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WAR MACHINE

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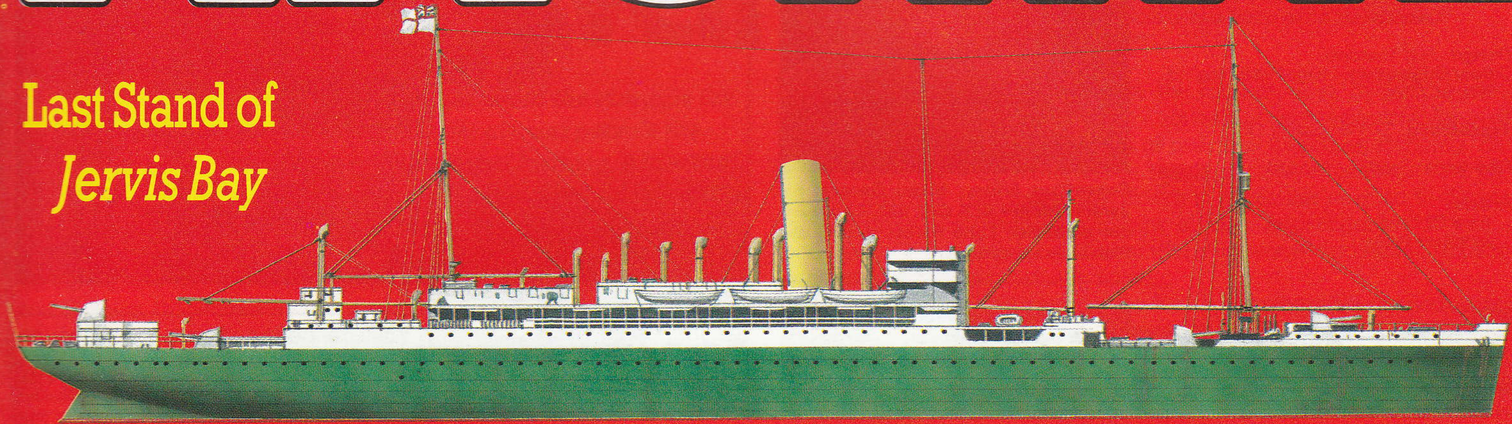

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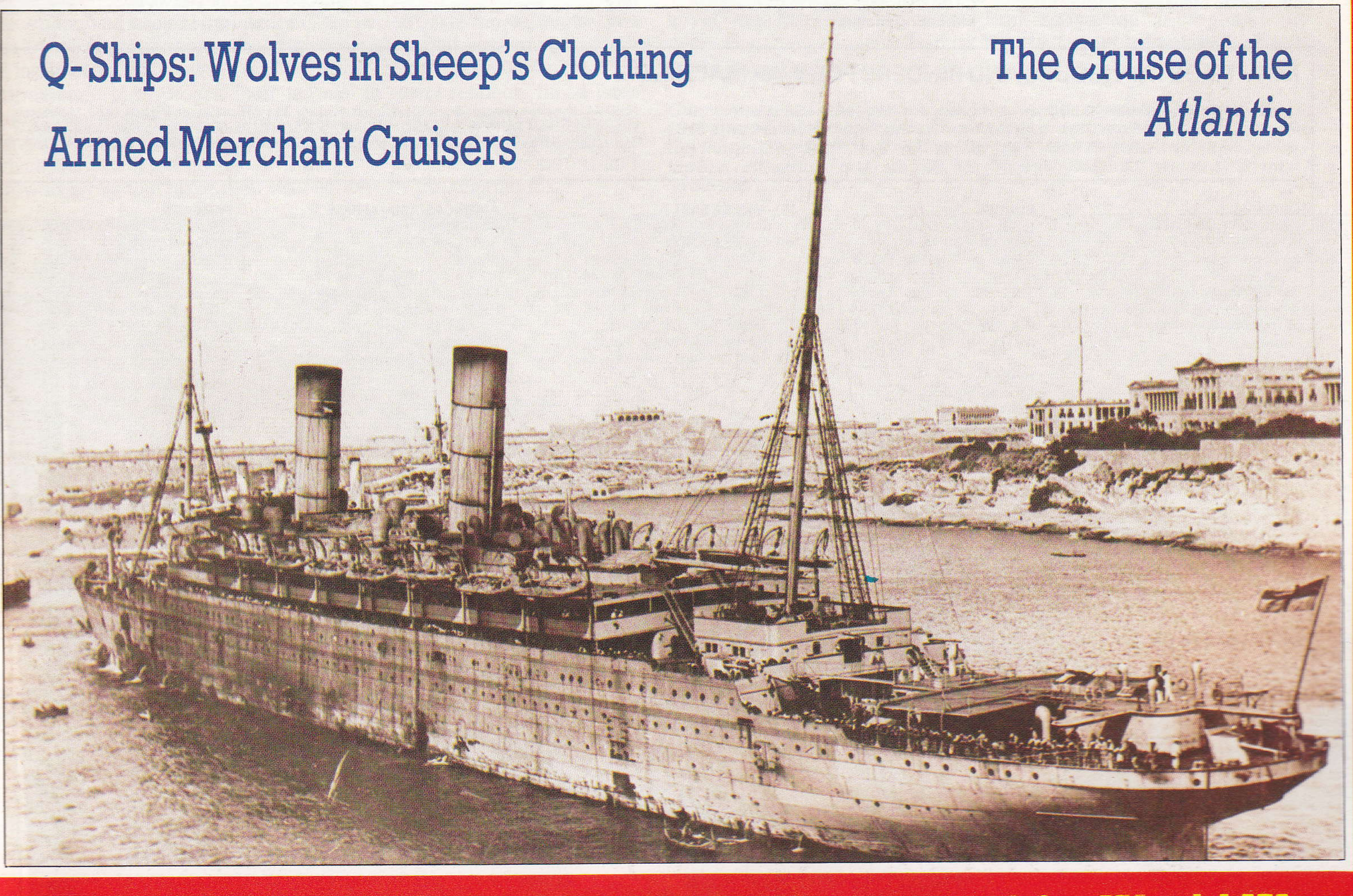
Armed Merchant Cruisers

The Cruise of the *Atlantis*



A fully illustrated guide to Armed Merchantmen of the World Wars

WAR MACHINE

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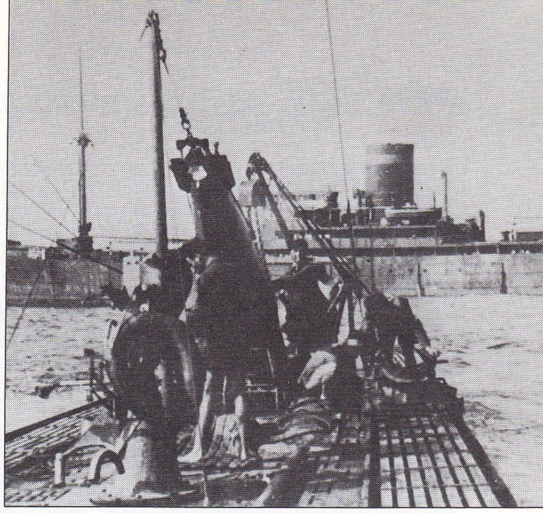
Armed Merchantmen of the World Wars



German armed merchant vessels made lengthy commerce-raiding voyages during both wars. They often resupplied U-boats on distant stations; here Kormoran *is off the coast of Natal with* U-124. *The raider is disguised superficially as a (then neutral) Japanese freighter.*

In both world wars, merchant ships joined in the struggle for control of the sea lanes. To augment its cruiser patrols the Royal Navy employed Armed Merchant Cruisers, while the Germans sent out merchantmen with concealed armament to prey on Allied commerce.

There exists a link between raiders, armed merchant cruisers (AMCs) and Q-Ships, three unlikely groups of ship. The British armed merchant cruisers were overtly-armed auxiliary warships, usually passenger liners of medium size, converted to plug (on a temporary basis) the gaps in the numbers of regular warships. Where their function was readily apparent, however, this was not the case with the raiders. The first of these were armed German express liners, relying on speed rather than deception and failing lamentably in the role. They were replaced by a variety of merchantmen, most of the them powerfully armed in a variety of ingeniously covert ways and depending on a convincingly innocent appearance to approach their targets. In many respects these later raiders were influenced by the Q-Ships, very much British compromises developed as a desperate measure to meet a submarine campaign for which there existed no effective antidote. They were skippered and crewed by redoubtable men with an eye for the unorthodox.

Of all these makeshift warships, the raiders were by far the most successful in both world wars. They not only accounted in total for over 1.25 million gross registered tons of precious merchant shipping, but also caused endless disruption in resultant delayed sailings and circuitous routings. In addition the British in particular needed to devote considerable resources in warships in their apprehension. It was a peculiarly German pastime, the handful of Japanese and Italian ships so converted achieving virtually nothing.

AMCs were viewed even by the British as vulnerable but necessary stopgaps, to be put back into commercial service at the earliest opportunity. Though proving vulnerable to both submarine and surface raider, their contribution to the long-term success of distant blockade should not be overlooked.

The Q-Ship concept has become over-romanticized and is discussed elsewhere, but it was the nearest British equivalent to the raider: disguised innocence trailing its cloak to attract a particular variety of prey, in this case the U-boat.

Gunnery practice takes place aboard the German commerce raider Wolf *in 1918 after her triumphant return from a cruise, during which she laid mines off Ceylon and South Africa as well as taking 14 Allied merchant ships. She was the first raider to carry an aircraft, her Friedrichshafen E 33 being christened 'Wölfchen'.*

GERMANY

Seeadler

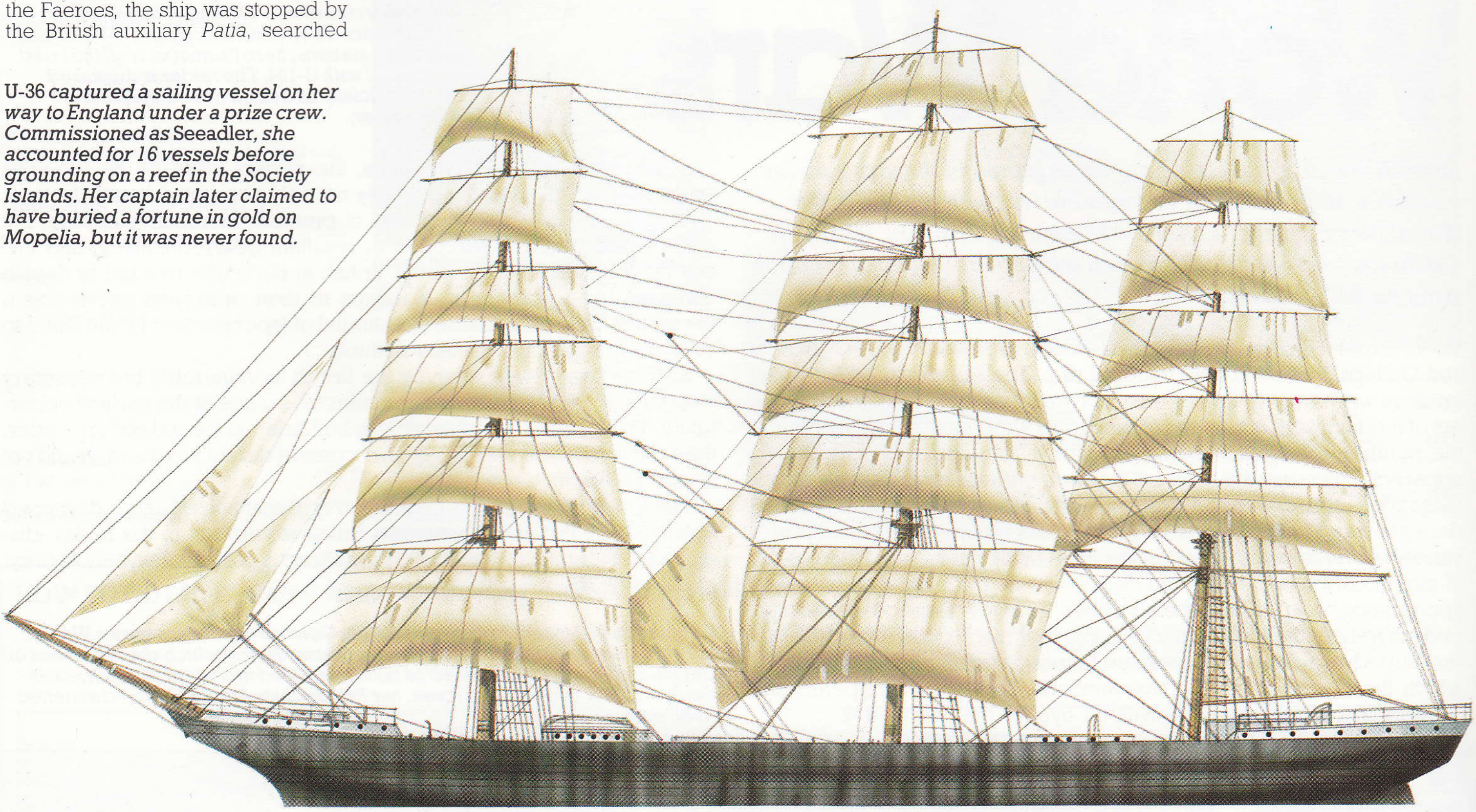
Seeadler was unusual as a raider, even by World War I standards: she was by far the oldest, she was herself a prize, and she was a sailing ship. The great drawbacks of sail were offset by an auxiliary diesel and a totally innocuous appearance. Built in Scotland during 1878 as the *Pass of Belmaha*, she had been under the still-neutral American flag when taken as a German prize by the *U-36*. Suitably armed, and well disguised as the Norwegian *Irma*, she sailed at the end of 1916 under the command of the able but flamboyant Felix, Graf von Luckner, the self-styled *Seeteufel* (sea devil).

Thoroughness of preparation paid off for, on Christmas Day, north west of the Faeroes, the ship was stopped by the British auxiliary *Patia*, searched and released. Von Luckner headed for Brazilian waters, successfully stopping and sinking two British merchantmen on the way. With cruiser patrols diverted to address priorities elsewhere, the raider slipped through without trouble. Operating in a fairly tight area near the isolated St Paul's Rocks, *Seeadler* took nine ships in two months. Overloaded with prisoners, von Luckner sent them to Brazil in a captured French barque; interrogated, they were able to indicate a likely intention by von Luckner to double Cape Horn. This he succeeded in doing, in poor conditions, on 19 April 1917, despite very tight surveillance on the area by British cruisers, one of which he claimed to have sighted.

The *Seeadler* cruised, unreported, up the Chilean coast to latitude 35° South before opening out north westwards into the Pacific, crossing the equator in early June. With the USA now in the war, their ships were also fair game and three small inter-island traders were taken in June and July. Fate now took a hand. With no refrigerated fresh provisions, the crew began to develop scurvy. Von Luckner accordingly made for an unpopulated island for rest and recreation. After a few days ashore, the Germans suffered a storm which wrecked the *Seeadler* on the reef. Despite taking open boats to neighbouring islands and attempting with considerable resource to commandeer a local schooner, all the crew were eventually interned for the duration. In 225 days at sea the *Seeadler* netted 16 ships of 30,100 grt.

Specification
Seeadler

Displacement: 4,500 tons
Dimensions: length 83.5 m (274.08 ft); beam 11.8 m (38.75 ft); draught 5.5 m (18.08 ft)
Propulsion: one auxiliary diesel delivering 900 bhp (671 kW) to one shaft
Speed: 9 kts under power
Armament: two 105-mm (4.13-in) guns
Complement: 64



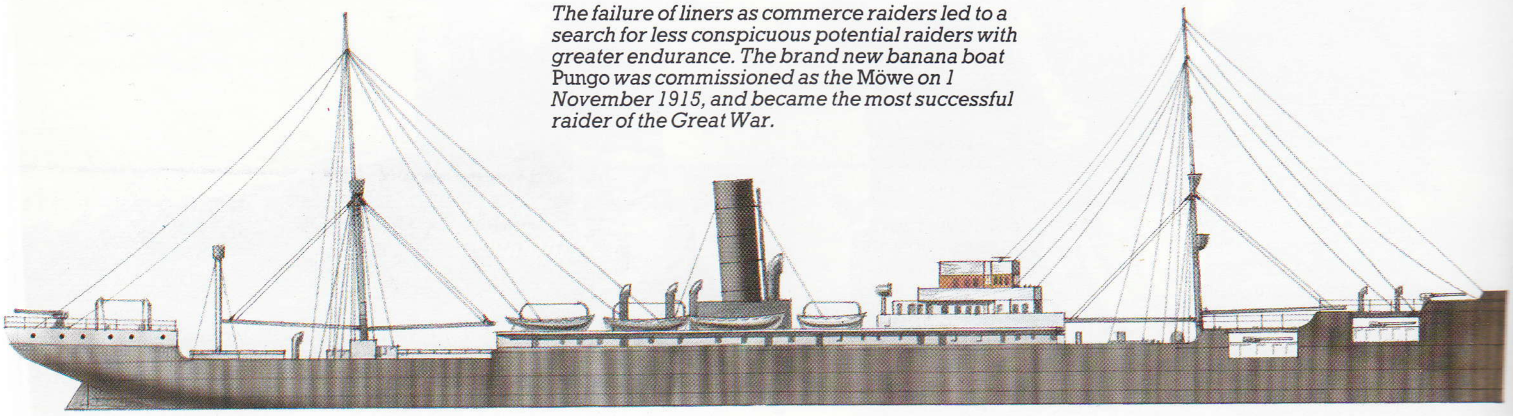
***U-36* captured a sailing vessel on her way to England under a prize crew. Commissioned as *Seeadler*, she accounted for 16 vessels before grounding on a reef in the Society Islands. Her captain later claimed to have buried a fortune in gold on Mopelia, but it was never found.**

GERMANY

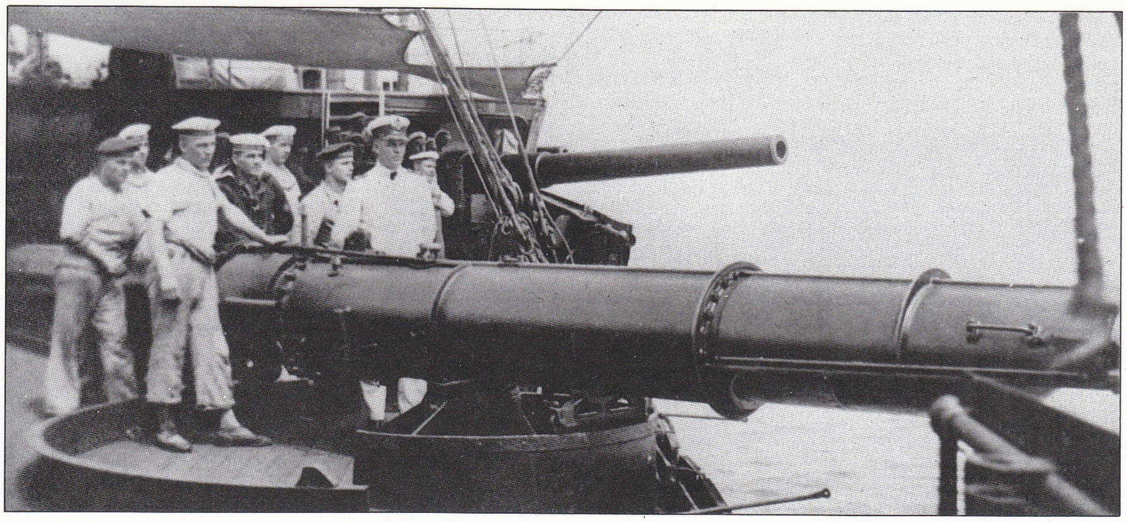
Möwe

It was the failure of their liners as raiders that prompted the Germans to exploit the innocent appearance of 'run of the mill' merchantmen. Such was the **Möwe**, converted from the reefer *Pungo*, a new ship completed in 1914 by J. C. Tecklenborg for Laeisz and successor to the fleet's 'Flying Ps' of the sailing ship era. As a reefer, her speed was superior to that of the average freighter and she was fitted out along the lines of a British Q-Ship, about which much was by now (1915) known. She differed from them in having the ability to carry and lay up to 500 mines. Her captain was Nikolaus Burggraf und Graf, zu Dohna-Schlodien, whose aristocratic Ruritanian name was belied by his excellence as a raider commander.

On New Year's Day 1916, the *Möwe* laid over 250 mines in the Pentland Firth, one of which claimed the British battleship HMS *King Edward VII*, in-



The failure of liners as commerce raiders led to a search for less conspicuous potential raiders with greater endurance. The brand new banana boat* Pungo *was commissioned as the* Möwe *on 1 November 1915, and became the most successful raider of the Great War.



A view of one of Möwe's two 500-mm (19.7-in) torpedo tubes and one of her 150-mm (5.9-in) guns. Her minelaying raid sank the British battleship King Edward VII.

cidentally sailing for the first time in her career as a 'private' ship rather than a flagship. Having laid the remainder of his mines off French Biscay ports, zu Dohna-Schlodien began activities as a 'conventional' raider. At this he was remarkably successful, taking 15 ships (all but one British) of 57,520 tons in a little over six weeks in the central Atlantic despite great activity on the part of British cruisers. Her captures made her self-sufficient in both bunkers and supplies, yielding also useful up-to-date intelligence in many cases. Necessary attention to machinery also obliged her return, which was on 4 March 1916, her exploits having become so noted that the High Seas Fleet escorted her into Wilhelmshaven with a squadron of battleships after a 67-day cruise. As in the case of SMS *Emden*, the British almost admired the commander for his audacity, which was enhanced by humanity towards his captives.

Laden with a Pour le Mérite and Iron Crosses (First and Second Class), zu Dohna-Schlodien sailed again on 22 November 1916 and, in another 16 weeks, he added another 25 ships (21 of them British) of 123,265 tons. Several had been defensively armed and of these the *Otaki* had succeeded in inflicting some damage before being overwhelmed. Without doubt the *Möwe*'s exploits provided an exemplar for the largest numbers of German raiders in World War II. Surprisingly, the ship herself survived in mercantile service until April 1945, being finally sunk by British submarine torpedo off Norway.

Specification

Möwe

Displacement: 9,800 tons

Dimensions: length 123.7 m (405.8 ft); beam 14.4 m (47.2 ft); draught 7.2 m (23.6 ft)

Propulsion: one triple-expansion steam engine deliverig 3,200 hp (2385 kW) to one shaft

Armament: four single 150-mm (5.9-in) and one 105-mm (4.13-in) guns, two single 500-mm (19.7-in) torpedo tubes, and 500 mines

Complement: 235

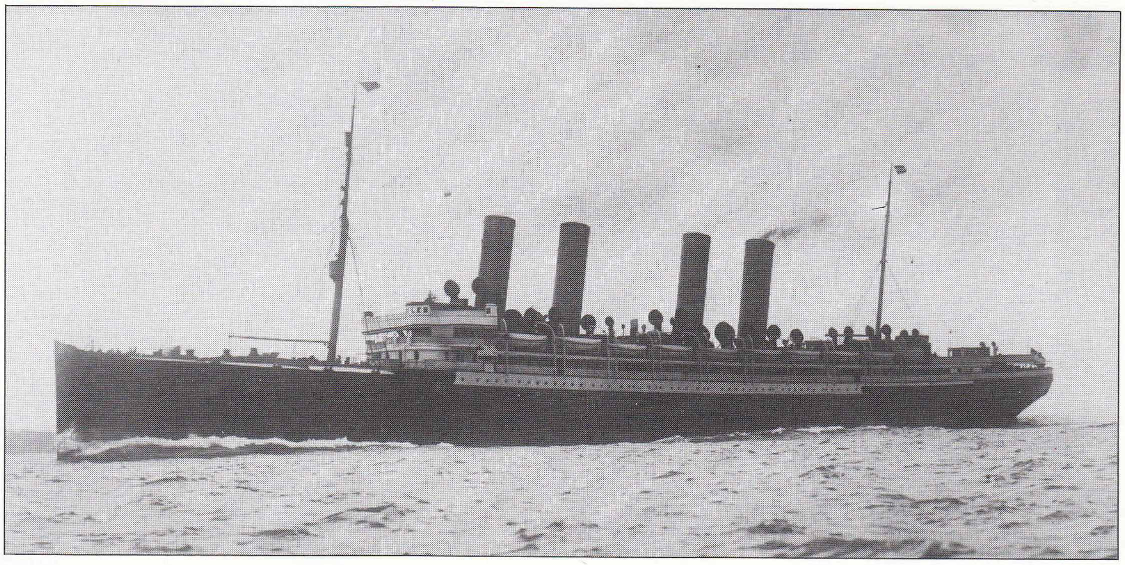
GERMANY

Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse

Norddeutscher Lloyd of Bremen owned superlative liners in the age when speed and elegance on the North Atlantic were normal. The seal of excellence was accepted as the capturing of the coveted Blue Riband and NDL took both the east and westbound records on three occasions between 1897 and 1907 with a trio of flyers, one of which was the ***Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse*** completed in 1897 by Vulkan.

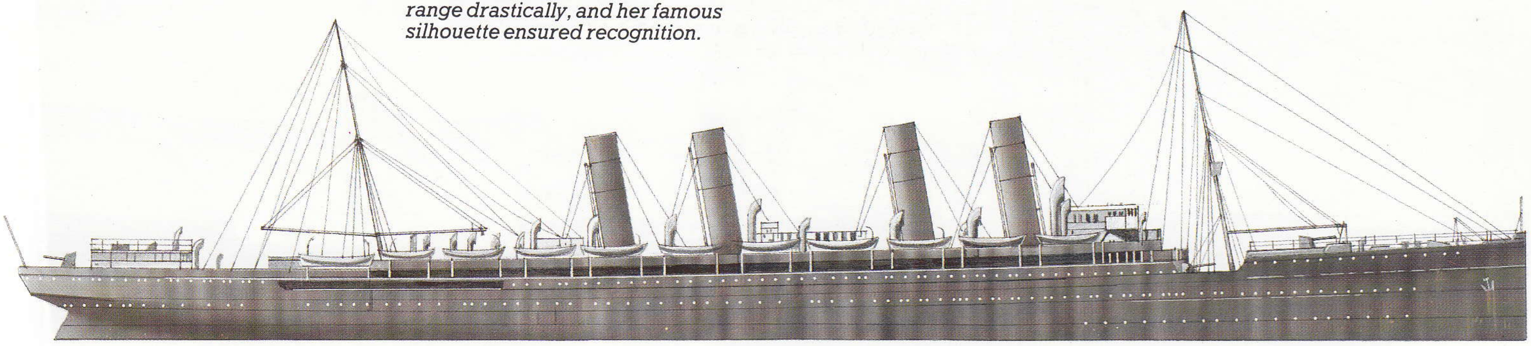
Stiffening had been worked in during their construction to allow their shipping of armament during hostilities. To have considered them seriously as raiders, however, demonstrated muddled thinking. Superficially their size, which permitted their mounting a reasonable armament and maintaining speed in a seaway, might have appeared advantageous, but their common problem was their enormous fuel consumption. Built for prestige rather than economy, as well as being instantly recognizable, such ships possessed all the characteristics that any specification for an ideal raider would avoid.

The *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse* was the only one of the German giants actually in home port as war became



Below: With their size, speed and seakeeping, liners seemed ideal raiders, but the career of Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse *proved this to be wrong. High fuel consumption cut range drastically, and her famous silhouette ensured recognition.*

Above: Winner of the Blue Riband in 1897, the Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse *was fitted out as a commerce raider in August 1914. Spanish authorities turned a blind eye to her use of Rio De Oro as a base, and she was sunk there by the elderly British cruiser* Highflyer.



inevitable and was rapidly painted all-black and equipped with her armament, sailing under her new regular naval captain, Reymann, from Bremerhaven on 5 August 1914. By getting away so quickly and hugging the Norwegian coast, the ship was ahead of the Royal Navy's establishment of the Northern Patrol and she entered the Denmark Strait from the north on 7 August. Here she stopped and sank the British trawler *Tubal Cain*, all of 225 gross tons.

By 15 August she had arrived in her operating area south west of the Canaries and created consternation by quickly taking four British ships. Two, the Union Castle's *Galician* and the Royal Mail's *Arlanza*, were spared as a result of the large number of passengers carried, but the refrigerator ships *Kaipara* and the *Nyanga* were sunk. With this short cruise the raider was so short of fuel that she had to put into the isolated anchorage of Rio de Oro on the Spanish Sahara coast. While the British succeeded in intercepting many of the available colliers in the area, four had got through and coaling was in progress when, on 26 August, it was dramatically interrupted by the arrival of the little British 152-mm (6-in) cruiser HMS *Highflyer*. Refusing to surrender, the liner was sunk in 90 minutes in an unequal contest, lying on her side in shallow water. A further raiding cruise into the South Atlantic was thus frustrated. A cruise of 22 days had netted three ships of 10,695 grt.

Specification
Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse

Displacement: 24,300 tons
Dimensions: length 198.0 m (649.6 ft); beam 20.1 m (65.9 ft); draught 8.4 m (27.6 ft)
Propulsion: two triple-expansion steam engines delivering 28,000 ihp (20880 kW) to two shafts
Speed: 22.5 kts
Armament: six single 105-mm (4.13-in) and two single 37-mm guns
Complement: 584

GERMANY

Meteor

Minelaying is a very cost-effective form of maritime warfare and, following the political controversy consequent upon the initial U-boat campaign in World War I, the Germans switched quickly to the use of half a dozen raiders in the minelaying role. Of these, the ***Meteor*** was an excellent example of apparent innocence. Built by Ramage & Ferguson in Leith in 1903 for the Currie Line's Leith-Continental service, the *Vienna* was caught in Hamburg at the outbreak of hostilities and detained. She was given a basic conversion (the first to a cargo ship) to carry not only a respectable armament but also nearly 350 mines, recommissioning as the *Meteor* in May 1915 but retaining her wholly British appearance with its original white-banded black stack.

Her first mission was to the White Sea, scattering mines over a great length of the shallow coastal approaches to Archangel as soon as the ice broke. Following the loss of several ships, this important supply port was closed until the British could send a minesweeping force north to the White Sea. She followed this operation by a short period in the Baltic approaches, sinking three small Scandinavian ships that were deemed to be carrying contraband cargoes. This 21-day cruise netted six ships of about 12,760 grt.

Meteor's activities were suspected by the British, who mounted several sweeps to intercept her, but without success. Then, in August 1915, she took bold advantage of her appearance to lay a full outfit of mines in the Moray Firth, a real danger to the Grand Fleet's use of the Cromarty anchorage. Wearing Russian colours she was, however, sighted and challenged off Kinnaird Head by the 1,620-ton *Ramsey*, an armed boarding steamer. The *Meteor* duly hove-to at short range and allowed the British ship to launch a boat with a boarding party before dropping her disguise, raising the German ensign and opening up with guns and a torpedo. Overwhelmed, the *Ramsey* sank in four minutes, her 43 survivors being rescued by the German ship and very well treated. Retribution was swift, however, with the 1st and 2nd Light Cruiser Squadrons and five of the Harwich Force cruisers putting to sea to catch her. Warned by Zeppelin of the British approach, the *Meteor* was scuttled, all on board transferring to a neutral fishing craft. Though located, the minefield claimed the destroyer HMS *Lynx* later in the day.

Specification
Meteor

Displacement: 3,650 tons
Dimensions: length 89.15 m (292.5 ft); beam 11.3 m (37.08 ft); draught 5.1 m (16.75 ft)
Propulsion: one triple-expansion steam engine delivering 2,400 ihp (1790 kW) to one shaft
Speed: 12.5 kts
Armament: one 150-mm (5.9-in), two single 88-mm (3.46-in) and two single 37-mm guns, two single 450-mm (17.7-in) torpedo tubes, and 350 mines
Complement: 187

UK

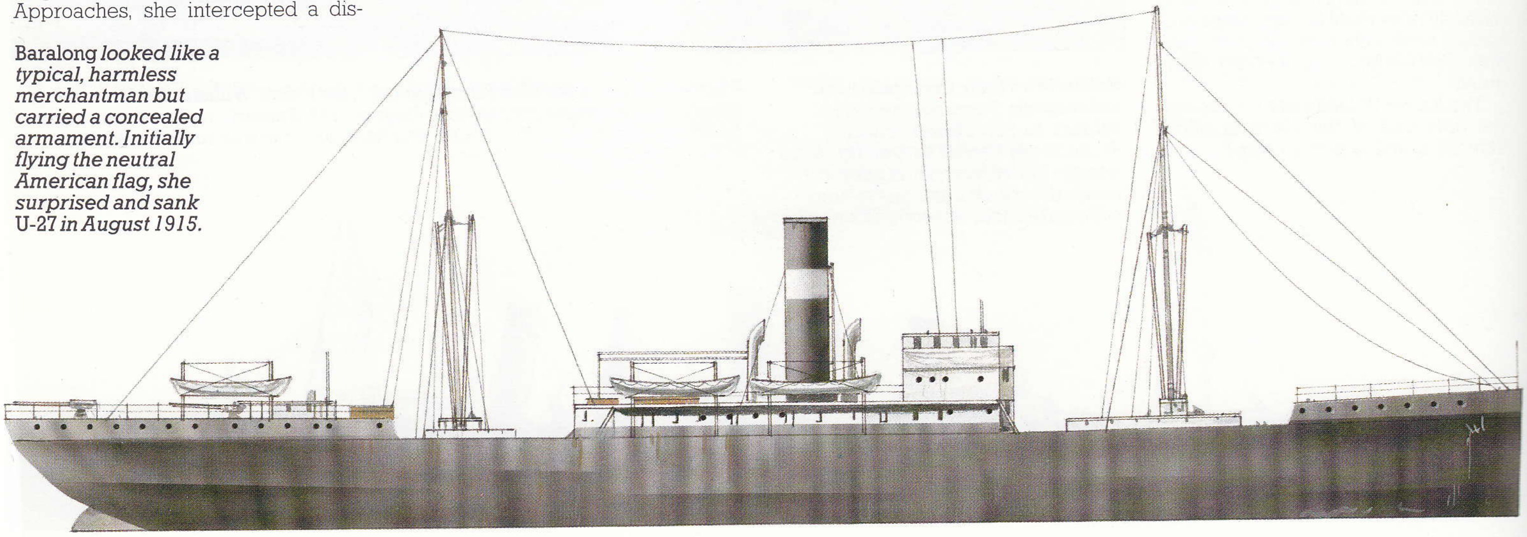
Baralong

The first attempt at converting a merchantman to a decoy ship was with the cross-channeller *Vienna* but, though she had the speed deemed necessary, her appearance was so distinctive that she looked out of place anywhere else. Her naval contingent, therefore, transferred to the ***Baralong***, a 4,190-grt vessel built in 1901 and hired-in as a naval supply ship. She was fitted aft with three 12-pdr guns, concealed by drop screens, and her holds were filled with empty casks to keep her afloat if torpedoed.

Not attached to any command, the ship covered 22500 km (14,000 miles) around the British Isles without succeeding in sighting a U-boat. Finally, in August 1915, while in the Western Approaches, she intercepted a distress call from the White Star *Arabic*, which had been torpedoed. Hurrying to the spot, the *Baralong* came across the Papayanni ship *Nicosian* being shelled by the *U-27* (Wegener). Running in under American colours, the Q-Ship passed behind the target, hoisted the white ensign and uncovered her armament in a well-rehearsed 30 seconds. In this early exercise the ship carried a squad of marines and so surprised the German that the submarine's gun crew were picked off by rifle fire as the larger guns got off 34 rounds. Many hit and the submarine foundered rapidly. A handful of survivors boarded the still-floating but abandoned *Nicosian*: instead of sinking her, *Baralong* ran alongside and put the marines aboard. All five Germans found were summarily shot as feelings were still running high over unrestricted submarine warfare and, in particular, the recent sinking of the *Lusitania* with the loss of nearly 1,200 passengers.

In September 1915 *Baralong* enjoyed a second success. She had changed her identity and appearance, now sailing as the *Wyandra*. She departed Falmouth following the rapid loss of three British ships north of Ushant and, on the morning of 24 September sighted the burning hulk of the 6,650-grt Wilson ship *Urbino*, abandoned after being shelled by the *U-41* (Hansen). The Q-Ship's appearance completely fooled the submarine which (as usual to conserve torpedoes) was operating with gun armament on the surface. Ordered to heave to, she ran slowly toward the *U-41* and succeeded in getting within 460 m (500 yards) before swinging and unmasking her guns. Several hits went home before the submarine could submerge and, so severe was the damage that it surfaced again almost immediately and foundered. There were only two survivors.

To preserve her cover, the ex-*Baralong* was transferred briefly to the Mediterranean before being returned to her original role in 1916. As a pioneer she had proved the possibilities of decoy ships and others were converted.



***Baralong* looked like a typical, harmless merchantman but carried a concealed armament. Initially flying the neutral American flag, she surprised and sank *U-27* in August 1915.**

Q-Ships: Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

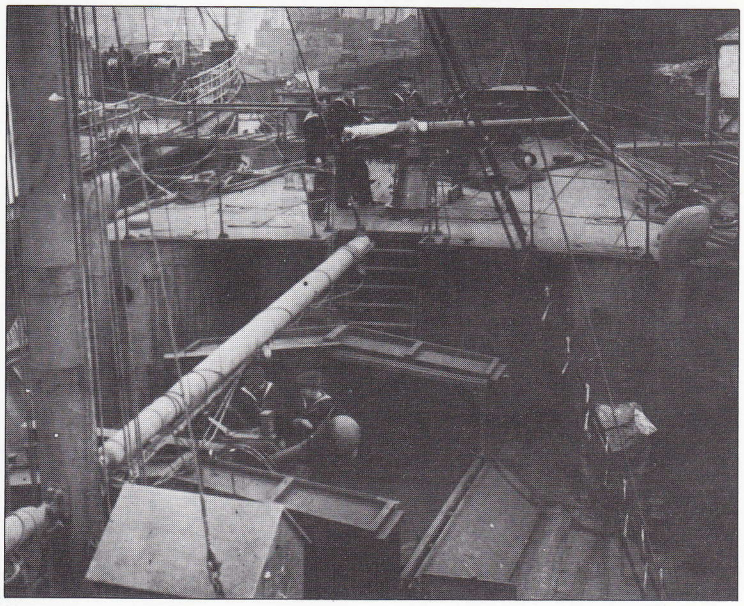
As the German U-boat campaign gathered pace in 1915 it became apparent that most U-boats were surfacing to attack by gunfire, conserving their small supply of torpedoes. A number of merchant ships were secretly fitted with concealed guns: the first U-boat to surface nearby was in for a disagreeable surprise.

It took the experience of war to demonstrate to the Germans that in their U-boats they had a weapon that could effectively dispute British control of the sea. Except for static minefields, the British possessed in 1914 no useful countermeasure against submerged submarines, Asdic (sonar) and depth charges still being in the future. Fortunately the U-boat had shortcomings that could be exploited: its submerged speed and endurance were low, and its torpedo stowage limited. It usually remained surfaced in transit, therefore, and habitually sank yet unconvoyed merchantmen with its deck gun to conserve its few torpedoes for more difficult targets. To take advantage of this vulnerability, the decoy ship was proposed (Churchill gives credit for the original concept to Admiral Sir Hedworth Meux) which, with a suitably concealed armament, would invite submarine attack, striking back as opportunity offered.

Secrecy was obviously paramount and the first five ships (soon popularly christened 'Q-Ships') were fitted-out in Admiral Jellicoe's distant domain at Scapa. It was one of these, the *Prince Charles*, that claimed the first success in sinking the *U-36* on 24 July 1915.

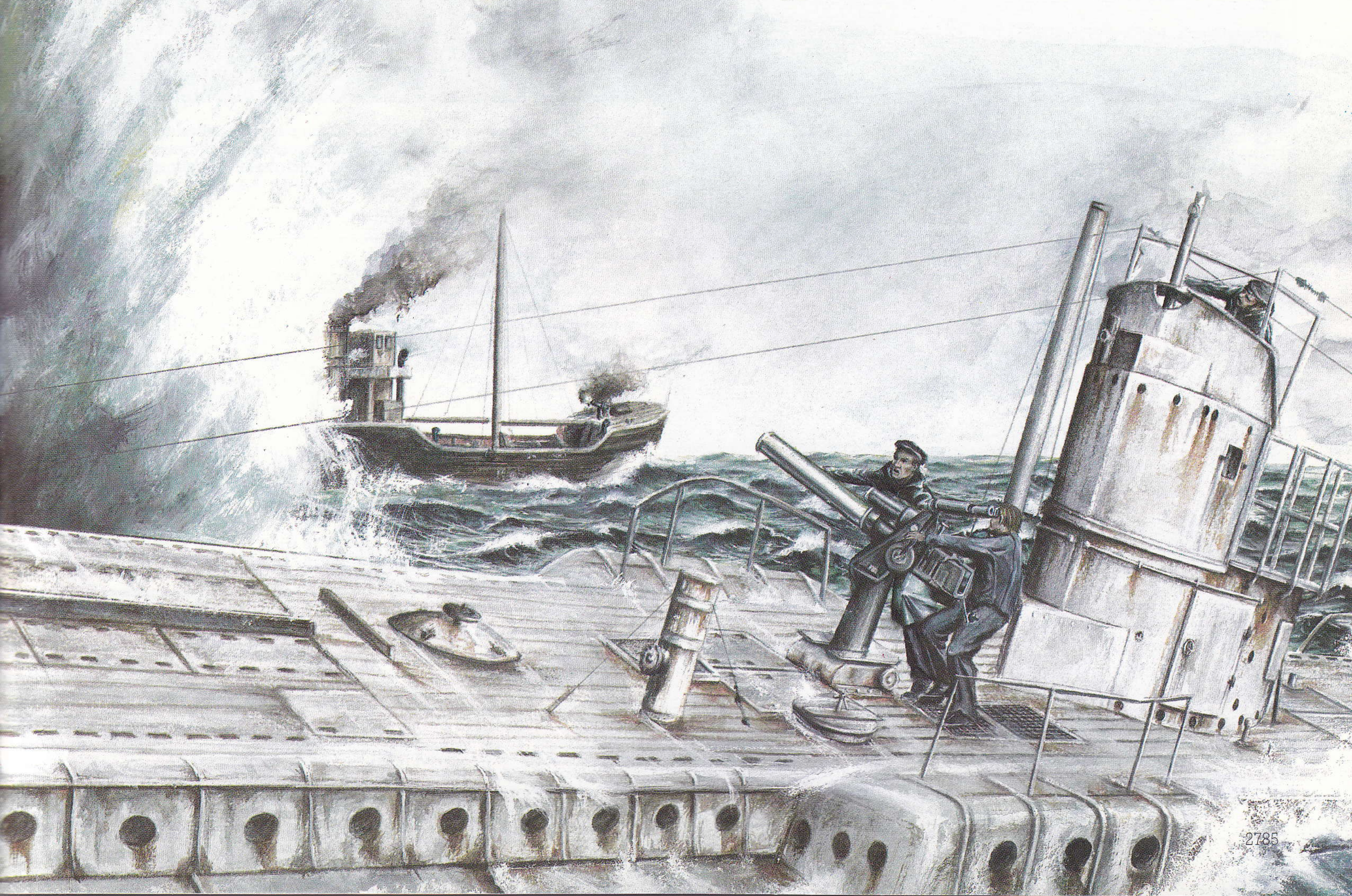
A useful Grand Fleet alternative was to use trawlers to tow small coastal submarines, submerged but linked by telephone, to discourage U-boat attacks on the important British fishing industry. On 23 June 1915 the *Taranaki/C24* combination accounted for the *U-40* east of Aberdeen. Subterfuge obviously worked, but it was essential to use constant variation on the theme, particularly as submarine commanders became more suspicious following unexplained losses.

In the summer of 1915 the *Baralong* accounted for two U-boats without any subtleties beyond a cool nerve and a good sense of timing. By the spring of 1916, however, when the *Farnborough* sank the *U-68*, the submarine had opened proceedings more positively with a torpedo attack. Critics of the whole Q-Ship idea point out that, by encouraging the nervous U-boat captain to use



Above: The armament aboard the British Q-ship Hyderabad *was all able to be concealed. The curious bell-shaped weapon in the foreground is a Sutton-Armstrong anti-submarine bomb thrower, normally hidden by the false cargo hatch.*

Below: A Q-Ship in action. The U-boat has surfaced to sink by gunfire what appears to be an unarmed freighter, saving its few torpedoes for more difficult targets. But at close range the merchantman suddenly opens fire.

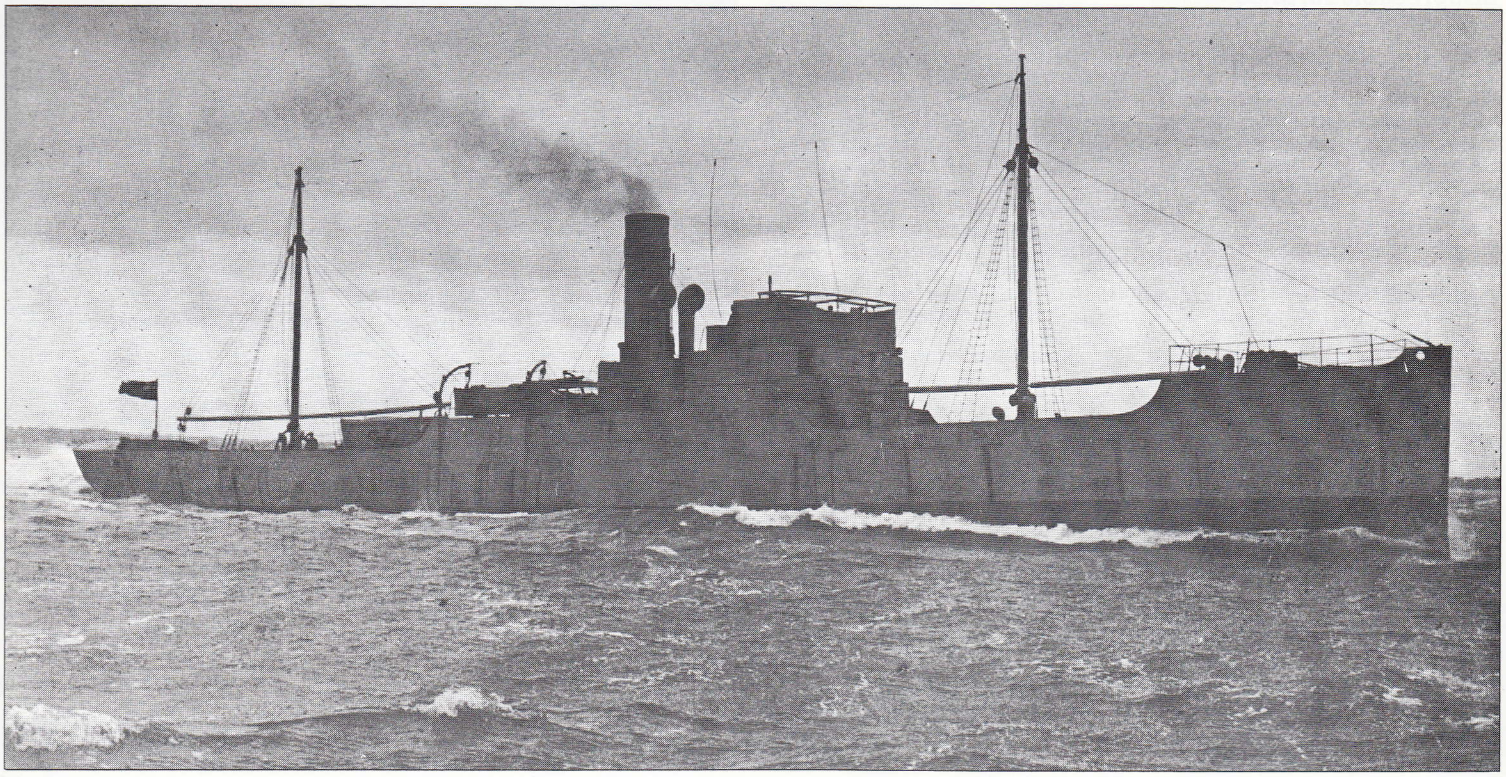


torpedoes rather than gunfire, targets were in greater danger. While this is true it cannot be gainsaid that by obliging the submarine to expend its torpedoes, the Q-Ship reduced the U-boat's time on station, with proportionately greater time spent on unprofitable transits.

Q-Ship techniques were rapidly refined with carefully organized panic, partial abandonments and fake damage to lure the unwary U-boat in to complete the kill. This was soon extended to a pair of partial abandonments and enhancing authenticity by actually allowing a torpedo to hit, the ship being filled with buoyant material to offset the consequences.

More and more complex ruses were required as the U-boats took ever fewer chances and, by August 1917 when several Q-Ships were lost, the scheme was considered to have run its course. In addition, the general use of the convoy and improved weapons were solving the submarine problem, while making any solitary ship look conspicuous. All told, the British fitted out about 180 Q-Ships, a considerable effort which, despite deeds of great heroism, was only meagrely rewarded. Only 11 U-boats were sunk by them and, of course, eight were destroyed by only four ships.

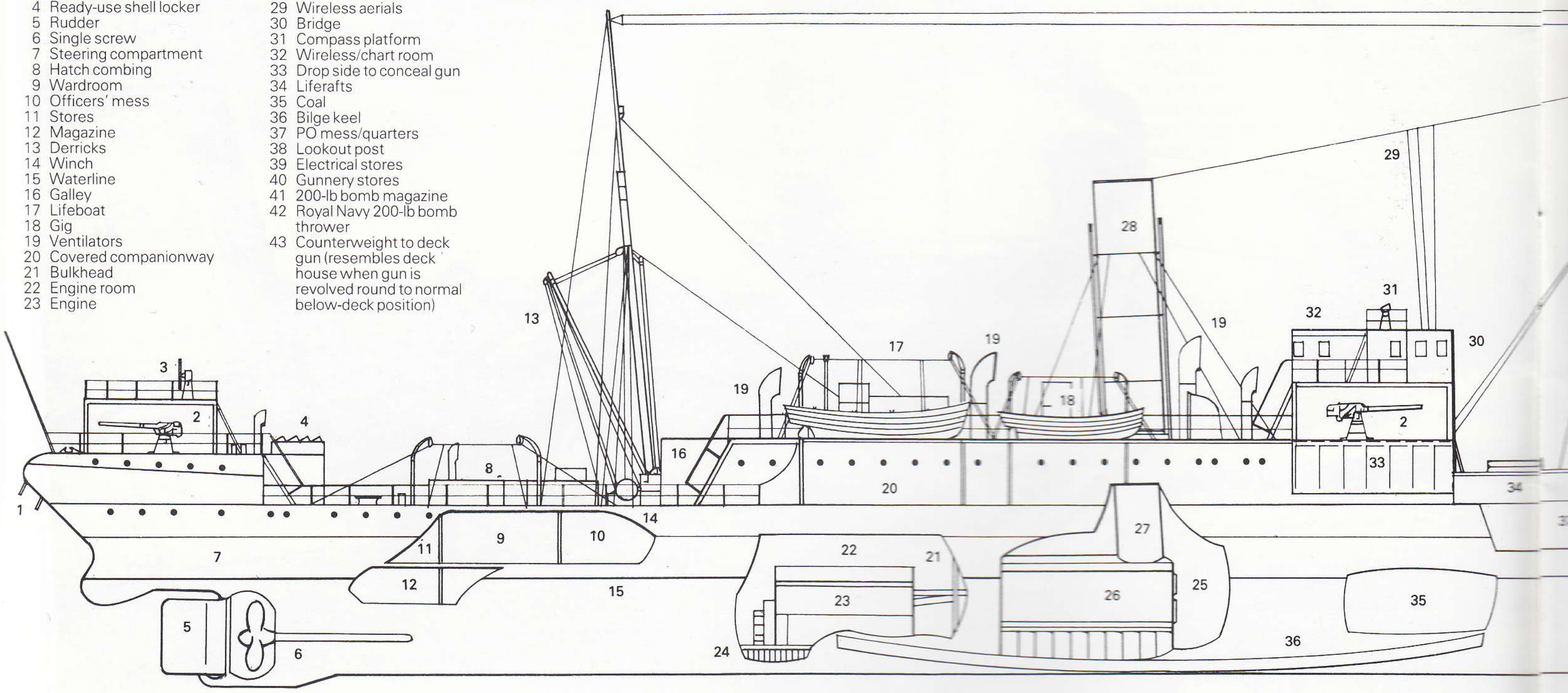
Rather unwisely, the British Admiralty resurrected the concept in 1939. Under the direction of Gordon Campbell VC, best-known of the earlier skippers and now a vice admiral, nine freighters were taken up and armed with up to nine 102-mm (4-in) guns, four torpedoes and depth charges, enabling them to tackle not only submarines but, in theory, the expected surface raiders. Several were lost, none achieved anything and an idea that had seen its day was put quietly to rest.

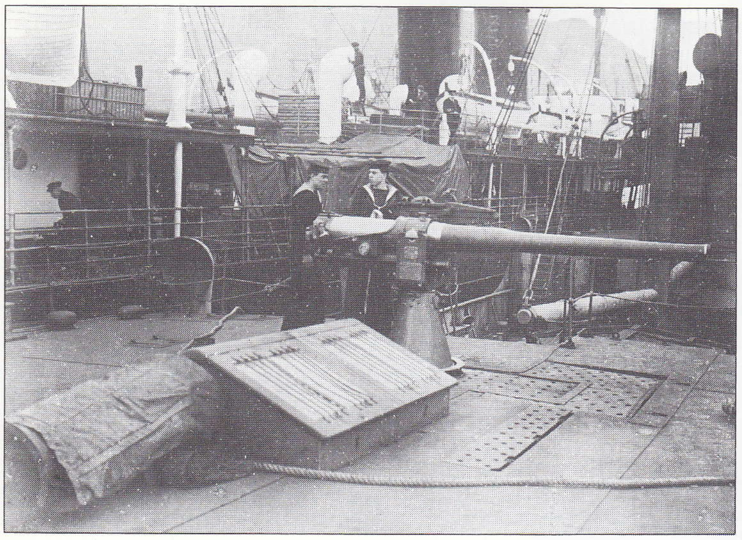


Above: PC boats were purpose-built 700-ton patrol vessels disguised as merchantmen, with false upperworks and derricks which caused severe topweight problems. Armed with one 4-in and two 12-pdr guns, they were based at Pembroke.

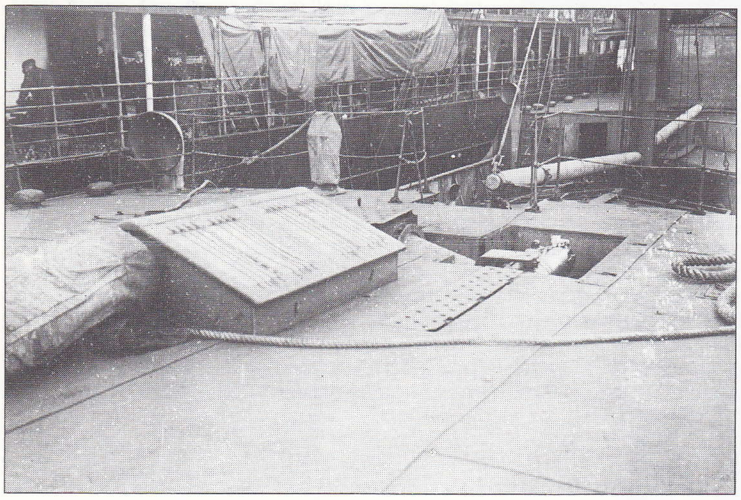
'Q' ship cutaway drawing key

1 Depth charge hatches
2 12-pdr QF (quick firing) gun
3 Collapsible wheelhouse (quickly folds down when gun is required)
4 Ready-use shell locker
5 Rudder
6 Single screw
7 Steering compartment
8 Hatch combing
9 Wardroom
10 Officers' mess
11 Stores
12 Magazine
13 Derricks
14 Winch
15 Waterline
16 Galley
17 Lifeboat
18 Gig
19 Ventilators
20 Covered companionway
21 Bulkhead
22 Engine room
23 Engine
24 Double bottom
25 Boiler room
26 Boiler
27 Funnel uptake
28 Funnel
29 Wireless aerials
30 Bridge
31 Compass platform
32 Wireless/chart room
33 Drop side to conceal gun
34 Liferafts
35 Coal
36 Bilge keel
37 PO mess/quarters
38 Lookout post
39 Electrical stores
40 Gunnery stores
41 200-lb bomb magazine
42 Royal Navy 200-lb bomb thrower
43 Counterweight to deck gun (resembles deck house when gun is revolved round to normal below-deck position)
44 Pivot to counterweight (allows entire unit to quickly turn upside down when gun is required)
45 Anchor winch

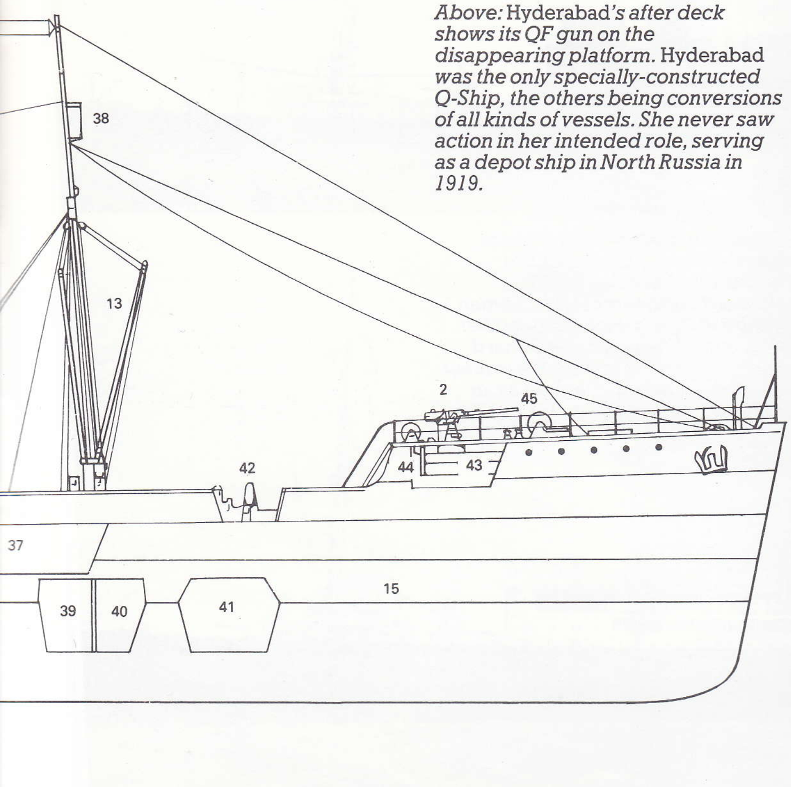




The after deck of Hyderabad *featured a pop-up gun, seen here raised to the firing position. Q-Ships depended for their success on the German U-boat captain deciding to surface and sink the apparently helpless merchantman with his deck gun.*



Above: Hyderabad*'s after deck shows its QF gun on the disappearing platform.* Hyderabad *was the only specially-constructed Q-Ship, the others being conversions of all kinds of vessels. She never saw action in her intended role, serving as a depot ship in North Russia in 1919.*



UK

Farnborough

Following the success of the *Baralong*, the 3,200-grt collier *Loderer* was acquired, commissioning on Trafalgar Day 1915 as the ***Farnborough*** as the first of such commands of then-Lieutenant Gordon Campbell. He was allowed considerable ingenuity within dockyard resources to arm the ship while retaining her totally innocent appearance: a 12-pdr was built into a collapsible house on the vessel's low poop; four others were housed in the amidships structure, sections of the ship's side being hinged as gunports; a Maxim gun was placed in a dummy hen-coop abaft the funnel; and two 6-pdr guns were sited high abaft the bridge. All guns were capable of being manned without disclosing the fact, using covered routes, and adequate ready-use ammunition was supplied for what, by definition, would be short but very sharp engagements. The old ship (she dated from 1904) could managed 8 kts on a good day and, while nondescript externally, was wholly 'pusser' below.

Based on Queenstown on the southern Irish coast, the ship spent several months cruising the Western Approaches, changing her appearance and markings at night. Following intelligence of a U-boat coming south down the west coast on 22 March 1916, the *Farnborough* ran a reciprocal course and, sure enough, sighted her on the surface. After a few minutes she submerged, the Q-Ship behaving as if no sighting had been made, though with all gun crews closed up. After 20 minutes, a torpedo passed just ahead and tension mounted aboard as a steady course was maintained, inviting further attack. The German (the *U-68*) decided to waste no more torpedoes, surfaced and overtook the ship. Her deck gun was manned and a shot fired ahead of the *Farnborough* as a signal to stop. A well-practised routine was then adopted, with the ship stopping, steam being blown and all appearances of panic aboard, with people running everywhere and starting to launch the boats. The U-boat was impatient and pitched another shell close aboard. He was right abeam at about 730-m (800-yard) range and Campbell decided the moment had arrived. The white ensign was run up, simultaneously with the shutters on the guns dropping away. Three 12-pdr guns and the Maxim were bearing and 21 rounds were loosed at the desperately-diving submarine. Several hits were observed and the *Farnborough* offloaded two depth charges over the spot where she submerged (a hazardous business for so slow a ship). The *U-68* rose again so rapidly that she struck the ship on surfacing and, at point-blank range, the Q-Ship again opened up and sank her.

On 17 February 1917, the process was repeated on *U-38*, the ultra-cool Campbell deliberately allowing his ship (now the 'Admiralty Collier' Q-5) to be torpedoed in the interests of authenticity. Kept afloat only by her timber cargo, she survived to 'go commercial' again after the war.

UK

Dunraven

Dunraven, a Cardiff collier of 3,117 tons and dating from 1910, was commissioned as a Q-Ship in July 1917 under the redoubtable Commander Gordon Campbell VC, DSO, later a rear admiral. She was well fitted out with a 102-mm (4-in) gun set in a depression in the raised poop, surrounded by a dummy knock-down hatch coaming, and four 12-pdr guns. These were in folding mountings on the forecastle and boat deck, and set each side amidships in ex-accommodation spaces. She also carried a genuine 'defensive' 2½-pdr gun, a common fitting on merchantmen at that time. Finally there were two old-pattern 356-mm (14-in) torpedo tubes operated from the bridge and fixed to fire on the beam, and depth charges that could be dropped (dangerously) through the counter.

The crew were seasoned, for the most part from the earlier *Pargust* and, after surreptitious gun and 'abandon ship' practice in an out-of-the-way area off the Eddystone, the *Dunraven* sailed on 4 August, to all purposes a typical scruffy tramp that could be met in hundreds in the English Channel.

Four days later the ship was west of Ushant, zigzagging like an innocent merchantman, when a submarine was sighted on the surface. The U-boat was cautious, submerged for a safe examination by periscope and resurfaced astern of the *Dunraven* which, while outwardly unobservant, had surreptitiously manned all weapons with crews concealed. The enemy was the *UC-71* (Salzwedel) which opened up at about 4575 m (5,000 yards) with the deck gun. Campbell acted 'normally' in turning away and returning fire (deliberately 'shorts') with the defensive gun. In the short sea, the submarine's shooting was poor, but the boat was allowed slowly to overhaul the ship. A near miss allowed Campbell conveniently to simulate severe damage by emitting steam from concealed pipes; the ship slewed, slowed and put over a 'panic party' in a mock 'abandon ship'. The U-boat then put three shells into the 'empty' ship one, unluckily, exploding a depth charge aft and causing a large fire near the concealed 102-mm gun, its crew and its magazine.

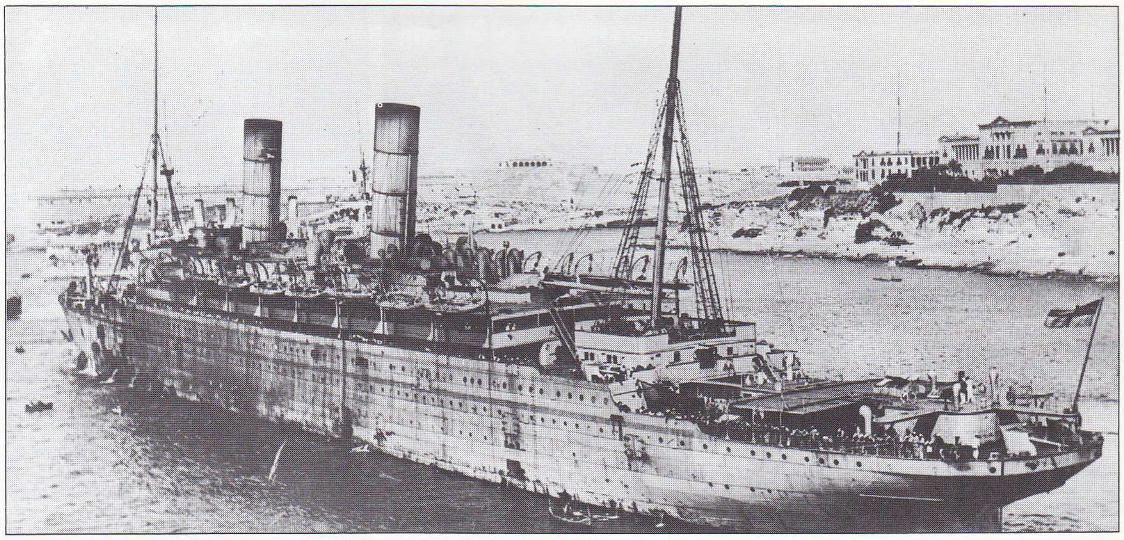
A nail-biting period elapsed, the remaining crew waiting for the cautious Salzwedel to close for the kill, while the fire aft began really to take hold. Just as the submarine finally approached, the poop blew up, the big gun and its ready-use projectiles flying through the air. All pretence was now at an end and, as the submarine dived, the white ensign was run up and a couple of shots loosed.

After 20 minutes, *Dunraven* was hit by the inevitable torpedo and a second 'abandon ship' was staged, still leaving a bare nucleus of men aboard. Burning and slowly flooding, the Q-Ship was leisurely studied by the *UC-71* which finally lay astern and shelled her steadily for 20 minutes before submerging and circling the ship. Both torpedoes were discharged in turn at the periscope, but Salzwedel gave up.

The survivors were taken off, but the sorely punished *Dunraven* foundered under tow. Though the Q-Ships were not phased out, this unsatisfactory action really marked the end of their effectiveness.

UK

Carmania



Carmania is seen at Malta in 1915. She suffered over 80 hits from Cap Trafalgar, *and was only just saved from joining her opponent on the bottom of the Caribbean. She was really too large to serve as an Armed Merchant Cruiser, and returned to commercial service in 1917.*

Sister to the *Caronia*, Cunard's ***Carmania*** was an elegant ship completed in 1905 by John Brown, and made the headlines in 1912 with the rescue of hundreds from the blazing *Vulturno* in mid-Atlantic. Days after the declaration of war, the ship was being gutted in a Liverpool drydock, rapidly emerging a drab grey and armed with eight 119.4-mm (4.7-in) guns. She sailed immediately to join Admiral Craddock's North Atlantic command.

At the same time, the similarly-sized German liner *Cap Trafalgar* of the Hamburg-Sud line had slipped out of Buenos Aires, where she had initially taken cover, and run north to the isolated island of Trinidada, off the Brazilian coast. There the ship expected to be armed with 150-mm (5.9-in) guns from the cruiser SMS *Karlsruhe* but was met instead by the little gunboat *Eber* from West Africa, which passed over two 105-mm (4.13-in) and four 37-mm guns, most of her crew and a new commanding officer. The third funnel (a dummy) was cut away and the remaining pair repainted interestingly in British Cunard colours.

Regular German collier movements of specific periods led the Admiralty to suspect activity in the vicinity of Trinidada and the *Carmania* was ordered to check the island. On 14 September she arrived to find the *Cap Trafalgar* at anchor, having returned from a fruitless fortnight's cruise. The approach of the *Carmania* was observed, colliers scattered and the German liner stood out to sea. The Cunarder had the speed advantage but though the German had only one 105-mm weapon that would bear, it outranged the British 119-mm weapons so range was rapidly closed. It was almost suicidal, with even the German 37-mm weapons in action. A serious fire on the *Carmania*'s bridge structure went unheeded in order to allow the British ship to hull the enemy: round after round hit on the waterline from less than 915 m (1,000 yards) and the *Cap Trafalgar* eventually foundered, blazing. Only by strenuous effort was the *Carmania* saved, having been hit nearly 80 times by the enemy's tiny armament and after what Churchill described as a 'brilliant action between two naked ships'. Really too large to be suitable for an AMC, the Cunarder returned to commercial service in 1917, finally being scrapped in 1932.

Specification

Carmania

Displacement: 19,524 tons

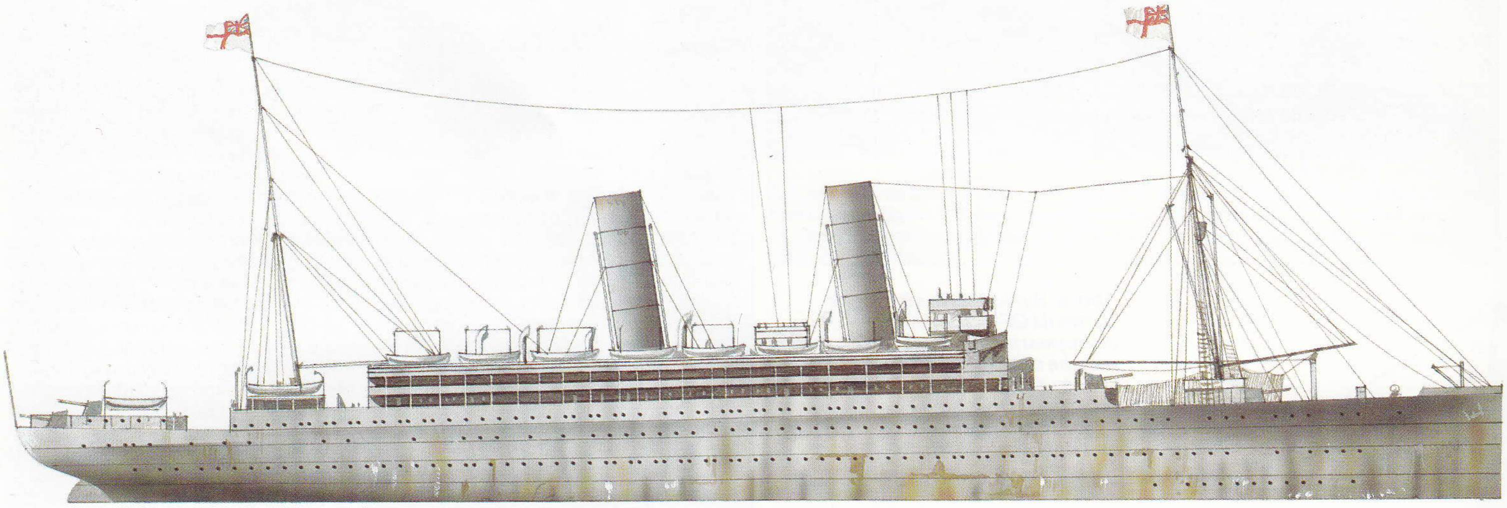
Dimensions: length 198.1 m (650.0 ft); beam 21.9 m (71.75 ft); draught 8.7 m (28.5 ft)

Propulsion: three sets of direct-drive steam turbines delivering 21,000 shp (15660 kW) to three shafts

Speed: 18 kts

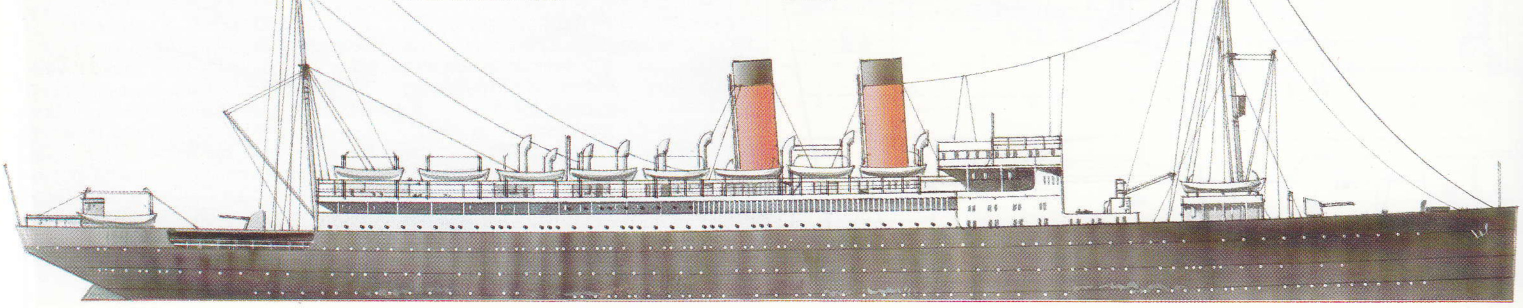
Armament: eight single 119-mm (4.7-in) guns

Complement: not known



Above: The elegant Cunard liner Carmania *was converted to an auxiliary cruiser in August 1914 and joined Craddock's North Atlantic squadron. She tracked down the German liner-cum-raider* Cap Trafalgar, *which was disguised as a Cunarder and sank her after an epic duel off Trinidad.*

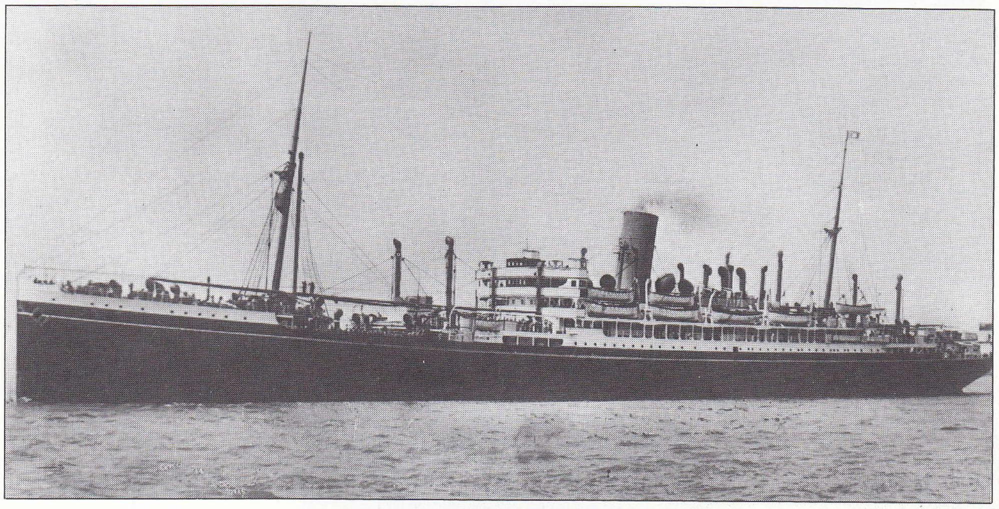
Below: Finding herself in Buenos Aires when war broke out, the brand-new liner Cap Trafalgar *steamed north to meet the German gunboat,* Eber, *which supplied her with guns. Disguised as a Cunard liner, she had the misfortune to meet a real one,* Carmania, *armed as an AMC.*



Last Stand of *Jervis Bay*

Pressure on the Royal Navy was so intense in 1939 that Armed Merchant Cruisers were sometimes used as surrogate warships. In October* Jervis Bay *was escorting a convoy from Nova Scotia to England but was attacked by the German pocket battleship* Admiral Scheer. *In the tradition of Grenville, the unarmoured merchantman closed with the enemy, her ancient armament spitting defiance as the convoy scattered.

Below: SS Jervis Bay *in happier days before the war. She was equipped to receive guns with the minimum of modification, and was converted to an Armed Merchant Cruiser in a matter of days in 1939 before sailing for Scapa Flow.*

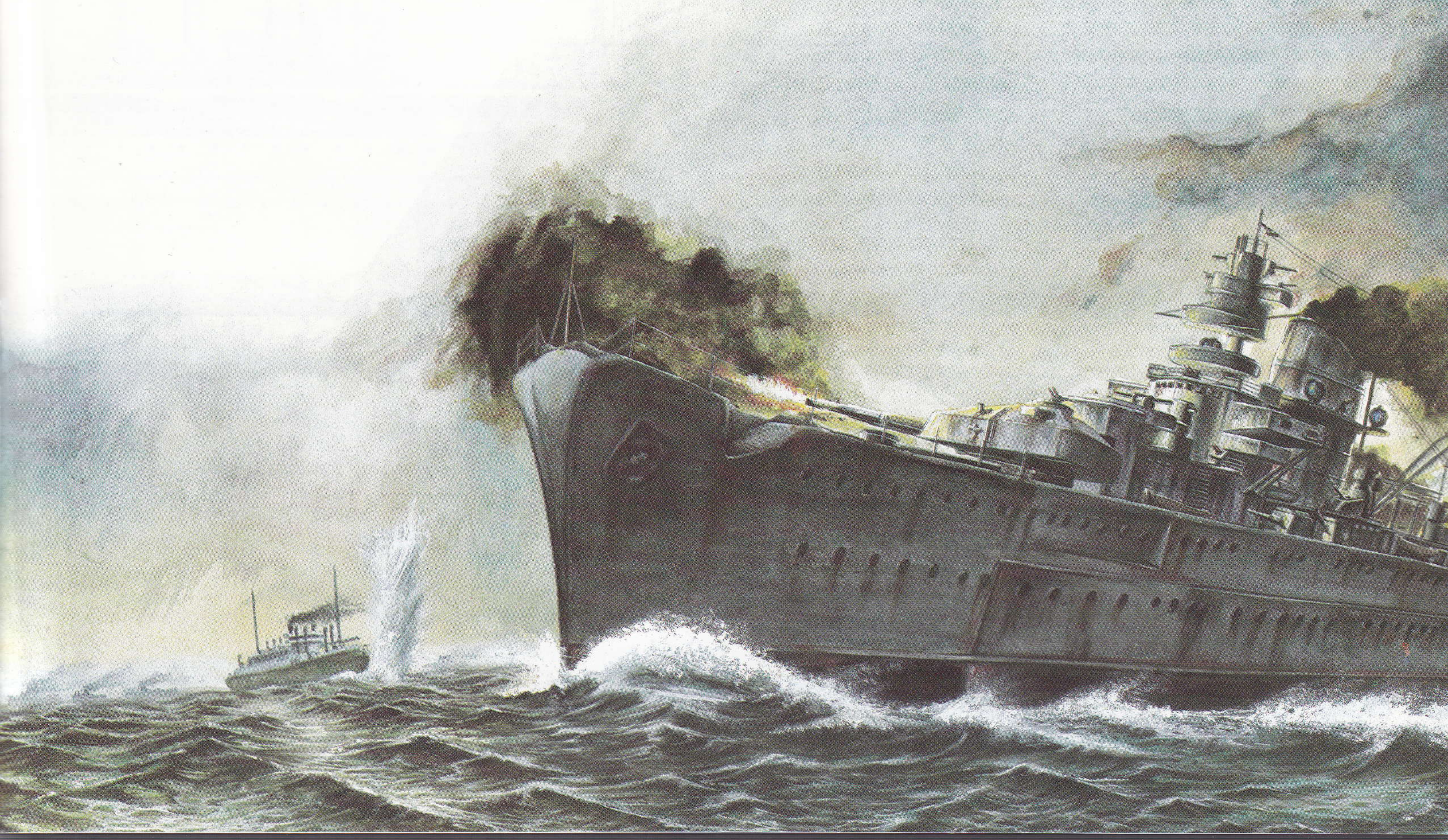


In both world wars the UK's merchant fleet was the only effective means by which the British could transport personnel and supplies on any scale. Its destruction would remove the nation's ability to wage war and, to this end, the Germans in World War II employed not only their prime weapon, the U-boat, supplemented by auxiliary raiders, but also long-range aircraft and heavy ships of the regular navy. Though formidable enough, the auxiliary raiders had neither the speed nor the firepower to tackle a properly escorted convoy and were used in long-range forays against 'independents'. On the other hand, all regular units of 203-mm (8-in) cruiser size and above were considered suitable for operations against convoys, and most of them were so employed at one time or another.

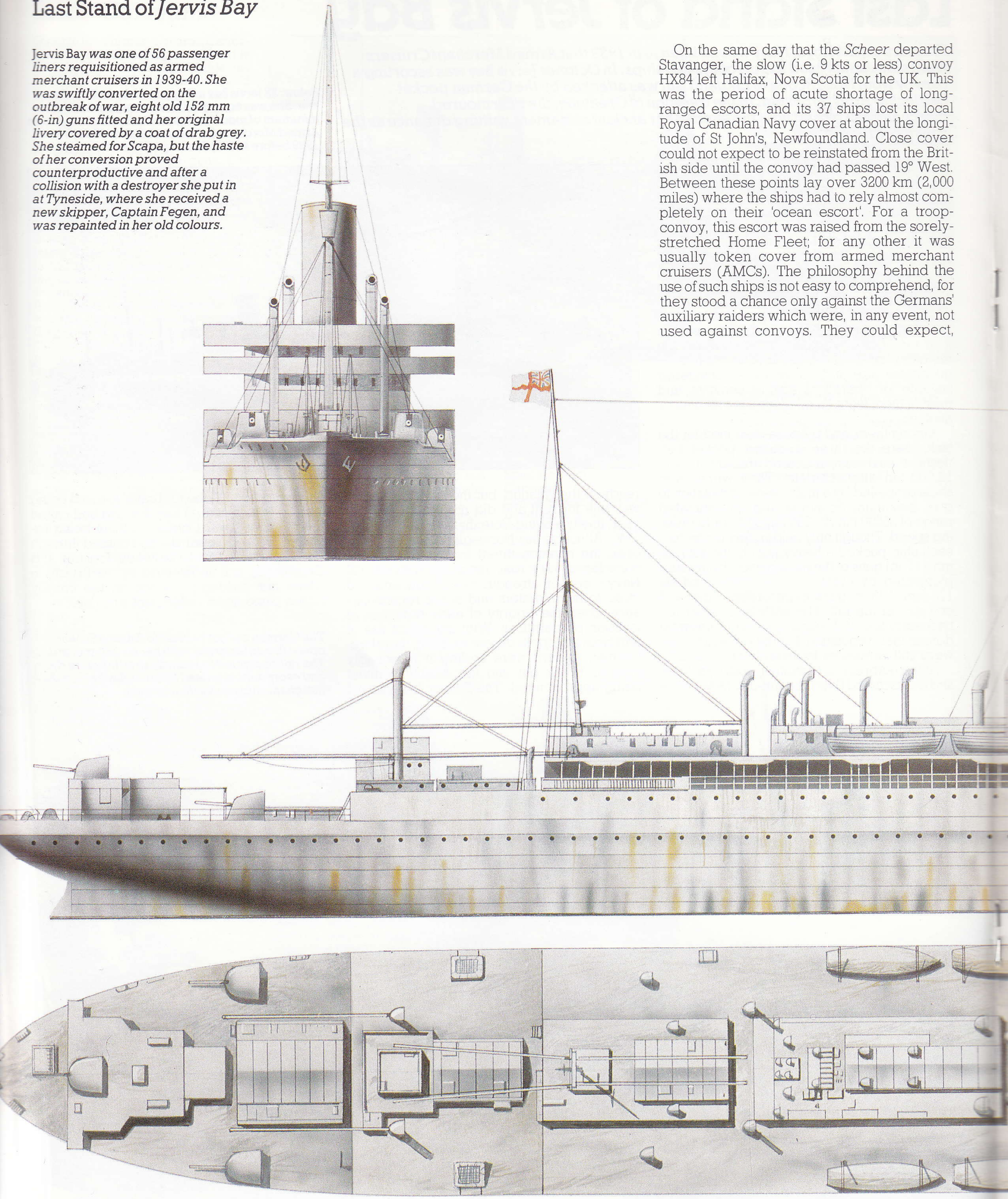
Among them, and purpose-designed for the task, were the three so-called 'pocket battleships', innovative armoured cruisers of about 12,000-ton displacement. They were 26-kt ships propelled by a multi-diesel installation to give maximum economy and an estimated range of 35000 km (21,750 miles) at 19-kt cruising speed. Though only moderately protected, each ship packed a heavy punch, the six 280-mm (11-in) guns of the main battery being supplemented by eight 150-mm (5.9-in) and six 105-mm (4.13-in) guns, eight torpedo tubes and two spotter aircraft. The early and rather unnecessary loss of the *Graf Spee* had somewhat dented their reputation, but the remaining pair were still viewed as formidable opponents.

At the outbreak of hostilities, both *Graf Spee* and *Deutschland* (later renamed *Lützow*) were ready in the Atlantic, but the *Admiral Scheer* was due for refit and did not sail for another year, finally leaving Gotenhafen on 23 October 1940. Although the Norwegian campaign was over, the invasion threat to the UK was still considered very real, resulting in the Royal Navy's cruiser strength being concentrated close to home waters and aerial reconnaissance given the priority of early detection of invasion preparations. With intelligent use of darkness and spells of poor weather, therefore, German raiders were finding it reasonably easy to break out into the Atlantic without being apprehended. The *Scheer* had passed westward through the Kiel canal to avoid being sighted from a neutral Sweden and had called at Stavanger on 28 October without being reported. By 31 October she had passed through The Denmark Strait (between Iceland and Greenland), still undetected by the British, to whom her sudden presence on the convoy routes came as an unpleasant surprise.

The German pocket battleship Admiral Scheer *opens fire on* Jervis Bay *with her six 280-mm guns. The raider sighted the convoy shortly before dusk, and every minute gained by* Jervis Bay *helped the merchant ships make their escape.*



Last Stand of *Jervis Bay*

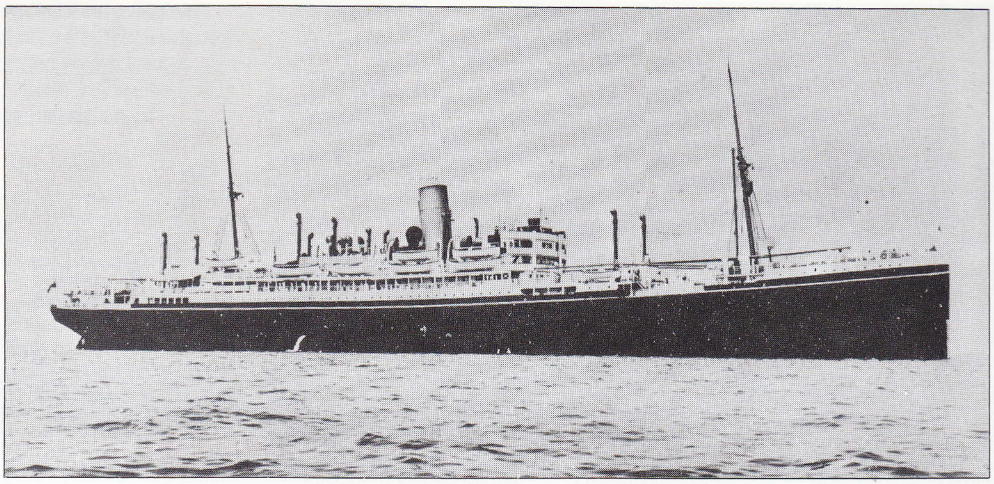


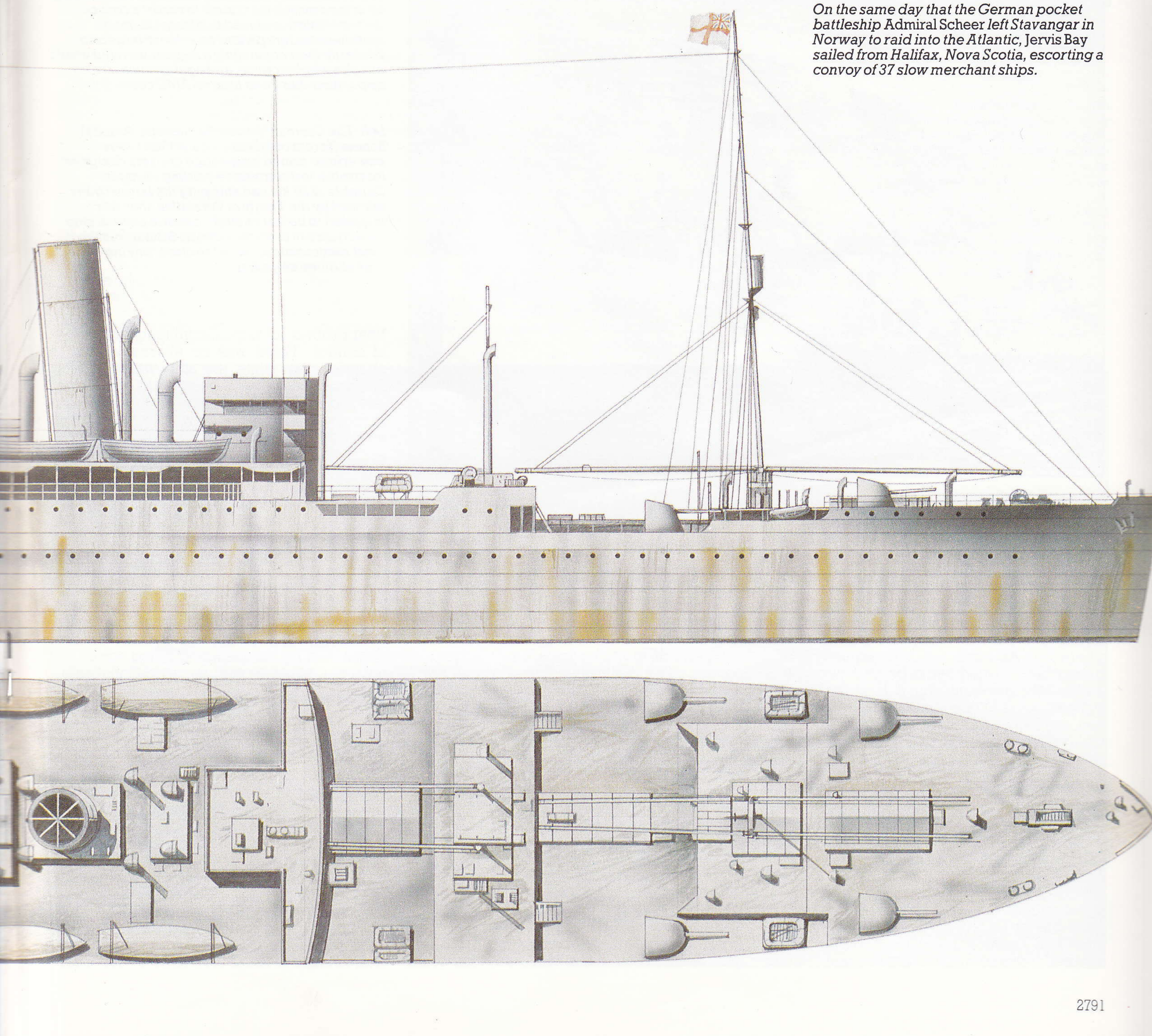
Jervis Bay was one of 56 passenger liners requisitioned as armed merchant cruisers in 1939-40. She was swiftly converted on the outbreak of war, eight old 152 mm (6-in) guns fitted and her original livery covered by a coat of drab grey. She steamed for Scapa, but the haste of her conversion proved counterproductive and after a collision with a destroyer she put in at Tyneside, where she received a new skipper, Captain Fegen, and was repainted in her old colours.

On the same day that the *Scheer* departed Stavanger, the slow (i.e. 9 kts or less) convoy HX84 left Halifax, Nova Scotia for the UK. This was the period of acute shortage of long-ranged escorts, and its 37 ships lost its local Royal Canadian Navy cover at about the longitude of St John's, Newfoundland. Close cover could not expect to be reinstated from the British side until the convoy had passed 19° West. Between these points lay over 3200 km (2,000 miles) where the ships had to rely almost completely on their 'ocean escort'. For a troop-convoy, this escort was raised from the sorely-stretched Home Fleet; for any other it was usually token cover from armed merchant cruisers (AMCs). The philosophy behind the use of such ships is not easy to comprehend, for they stood a chance only against the Germans' auxiliary raiders which were, in any event, not used against convoys. They could expect, therefore, to be pitted eventually against a regular warship and this contest could have only one conclusion. Four AMCs were based on Halifax at this time and HX84 was allocated one of them, the 14,100-ton *Jervis Bay*.

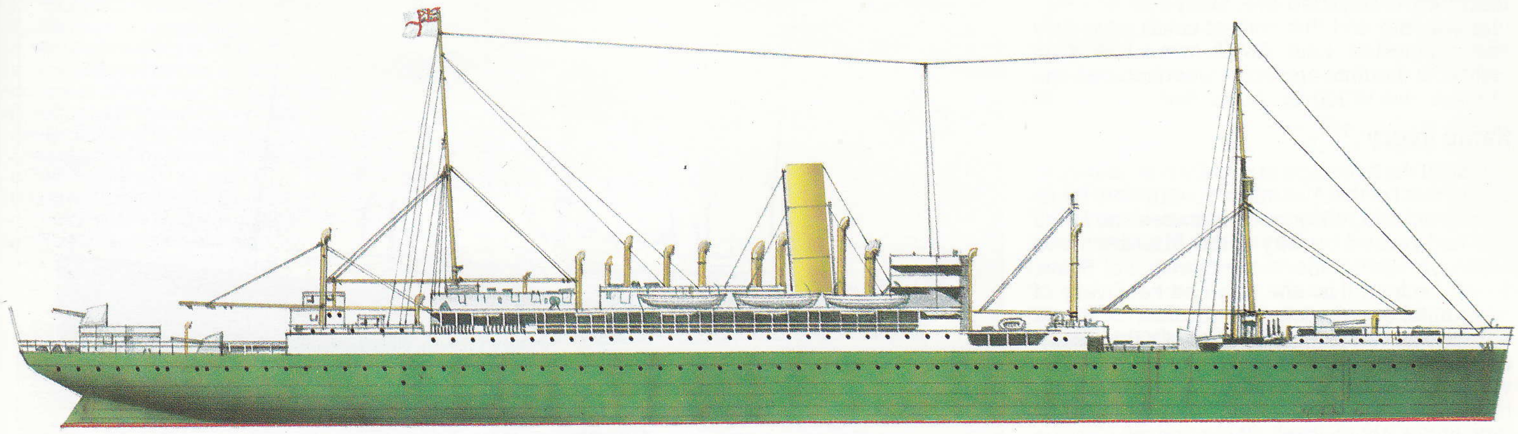
Same livery

One of the five ships originally built in 1922 to the account of the Australian government for its immigrant and refrigerated services, the *Jervis Bay* had passed by way of the Aberdeen and Commonwealth Line to the interests of Shaw, Savill. Despite this, she retained her livery of buff funnel over a distinctive Brunswick green hull (preserved to this day on the OCL container ships) and had no coat of naval 'crabfat'. She was crewed by a typical mixture of articled merchant navy men, reservists and naval regulars under the overall command of Captain Fogarty Fegen RN. Her armament consisted of

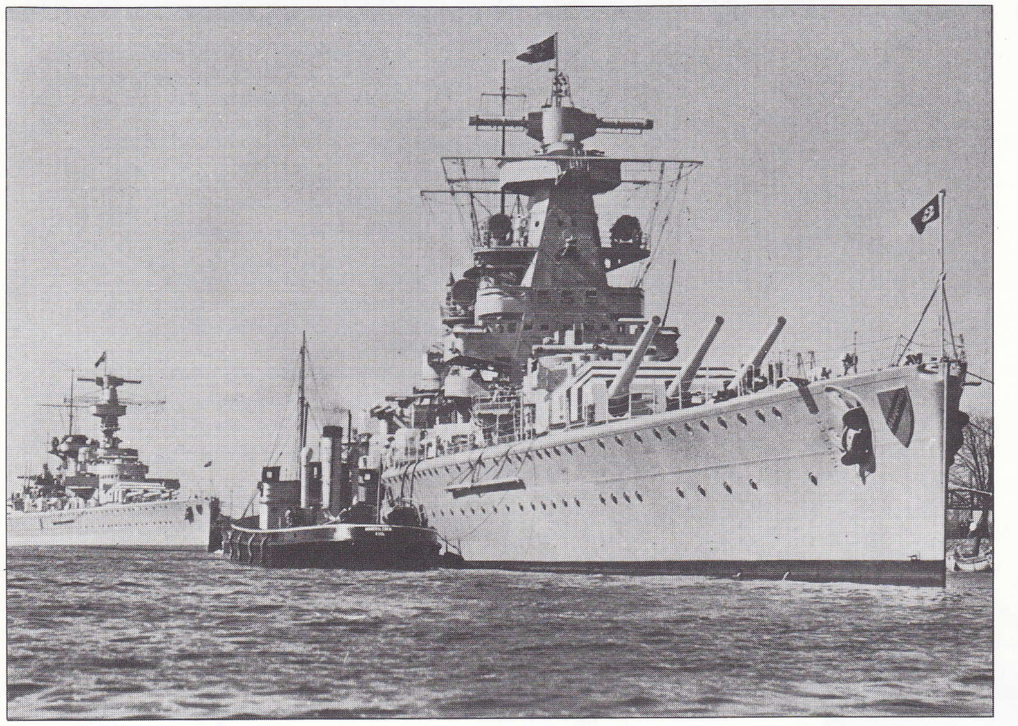




On the same day that the German pocket battleship Admiral Scheer *left Stavangar in Norway to raid into the Atlantic,* Jervis Bay *sailed from Halifax, Nova Scotia, escorting a convoy of 37 slow merchant ships.*



Above: Jervis Bay *as she appeared on 5 November 1940, when she was sunk by* Admiral Scheer. *Using an armed merchant cruiser to escort a convoy demonstrated confused thinking: German merchant raiders picked on solitary targets to preserve their cover; only a regular warship would attack a whole convoy, and against such opposition there was little an AMC could do.*



Left: The German 'pocket battleships' Admiral Scheer *(foreground) and* Deutschland *were powerfully-armed long-range cruisers designed for protracted commerce-raiding voyages. Capable of 28 kts and shipping the largest guns allowed by the Treaty of Versailles, they were intended to be fast enough to evade any warship they could not destroy.* Admiral Scheer *was the most successful raider of the class, sinking 137,000 tons of Allied shipping.*

obsolete 152-mm (6-in) guns, with rudimentary fire control taken from cruisers long scrapped.

Scheer, coming south, had been informed through intelligence channels of two closely-spaced eastbound convoys and had located HX84 with one of her Arado floatplanes. Acting cautiously in case the convoy was accompanied by an old battleship (as yet an unusual event) the German timed her arrival for late afternoon. As expected, she sighted smoke ahead but it turned out to be an independent reefer *Mopan* which, with a 15-kt speed, was not convoyed. While her loss was to be regretted, the removal of her crew and her sinking delayed the *Scheer* for a precious hour, though this advantage was offset by the ship not getting off the vital raider report that would have alerted the following convoy to its danger.

Convoy sighted

Dusk was already overlaying the calm face of the sea when the mass of the convoy was sighted by the Germans at about 23775 m (26,000 yards). Proceeding all-unsuspecting on a broad front of nine columns, it made an unmissable target and the *Scheer* swung to starboard to open her full main battery. She opened proceedings with a three-gun ranging salvo that fell with considerable spread across the central columns of the convoy.

Severe damage

Several ships, including the *Jervis Bay* had sighted the newcomer but were still deliberating on her identity when she opened fire. Fegen's reaction was immediate. Through the commodore, he had the convoy initially turn away and drop smoke floats which in the calm conditions were quite effective. The lone AMC, meanwhile, headed directly for the enemy. While this offered the the smallest target with almost maximum rate of closure, it also meant that that only her forward guns could hope to bear. For the while, however, this was academic as the German was well out of range.

This was in fact how it remained, for the enemy's shooting was excellent. *Scheer*'s third 280-mm salvo found its target, penetrating deep through the soft skin of the liner. Steering and one boiler room were immediately out of action, the bridge smashed and the radio room ruined, abruptly halting the continuous stream of raider warnings that was being transmitted. Within 15 minutes the ship was a wreck, dead in the water, ablaze and settling. Several of her guns were out of action while any that could bear probed out to maximum range under local control. There was no alternative but to abandon yet, while the ship was obviously finished, the *Scheer* remained to ensure her destruction rather than pressing on after her primary objective, the convoy, now scattered and disappearing into the gloom.

Supreme sacrifice

Jervis Bay's supreme sacrifice had caused no injury to her enemy but had bought the vital time that allowed her charges to scatter. Not all escaped, being still close enough to be savaged by the *Scheer*, which succeeded in destroying a further five ships and damaging others. Among the latter was the Eagle Oil tanker *San Demetrio* which, with accommodation and bridge gutted, but with machinery sound and cargo intact, was abandoned, then reboarded by her crew and sailed across half an ocean to safety with no navigational aids.

Few rescued

To his eternal credit, the skipper of the Swedish ship *Stureholm* was sufficiently stirred by the *Jervis Bay*'s spirit to return to the scene once it was fully dark. It was a venture fraught with risk but he gambled that the *Scheer* would be fully engaged hunting down the fugitives. His persistence saved 56 of the AMC's men, but Fegen was not among them. The Victoria Cross that the latter was awarded had been richly earned by a dedicated crew fighting a hopelessly inadequate ship.

As for the *Scheer*, she went on to complete her cruise in the South Atlantic, eventually returning safely to Germany the following April with 17 ships of about 115,000 grt to her credit.

Armed Merchant Cruisers

In World War I the British Admiralty successfully employed Armed Merchant Cruisers to assist the cruisers implementing the blockade of Germany, and they also served to escort convoys and seek out the German surface raiders. These roles were to be resumed in 1939 against a new generation of submarines and commerce raiders.

No fleet is ever large enough to cope with a major war, and every significant mercantile power has a long tradition of taking up selected tonnage from trade to act in auxiliary roles. Exigencies of war, however, invariably keep such stopgaps in service far longer than desirable, and involves such ships in situations with which they cannot cope.

The American Civil War demonstrated the use of the powered merchant ship in the roles of trade destruction and protection, as well as in blockade running. The British Admiralty, while custodian of the world's largest fleet, was moved to offer subsidies to operators of better class tonnage to work in such useful auxiliary features as extra bunker space, suitable stiffening for guns and machinery capable of higher than legend output. From time to time such ships were exercised cursorily in their intended roles, but disappointment was expressed that the fitting of that popular bogey, the torpedo tube, did not automatically make its recipient a formidable warship in its own right. Encouragement was nevertheless given to include a reasonable proportion of RN reservists among the crews of such ships, recognized by the award of an Admiralty warrant to wear the blue rather than the red ensign.

Although 20th century technological advances brought radio and aerial reconnaissance, the ocean was barely shrunk by them and a large number of ships were still required to seek out a solitary raider.

The British in 1914 made the initial error of requisitioning a number of very large ships as AMCs (as did the Germans with raiders) in an apparent misjudgment of their precise role. They were soon replaced by medium-sized tonnage.

Armed defensively, British AMCs were used in three major ways. They played an important part in searching the vast oceans for raiders, though when they found one they were usually worsted, though this was considered a justifiable risk. They were vital to the imposition of a successful blockade, particularly with the 10th Cruiser Squadron. In both of these duties their weatherlines and endurance were superior to those of regular warships, which could thus be released for more appropriate activities. Finally, subsequent to June 1917 and the establishment of an Atlantic convoy system, they were used to cover at least those commencing in Nova Scotia. With the oceans free of surface raiders in 1917, this was acceptable but, when revived in 1939, it certainly was not.

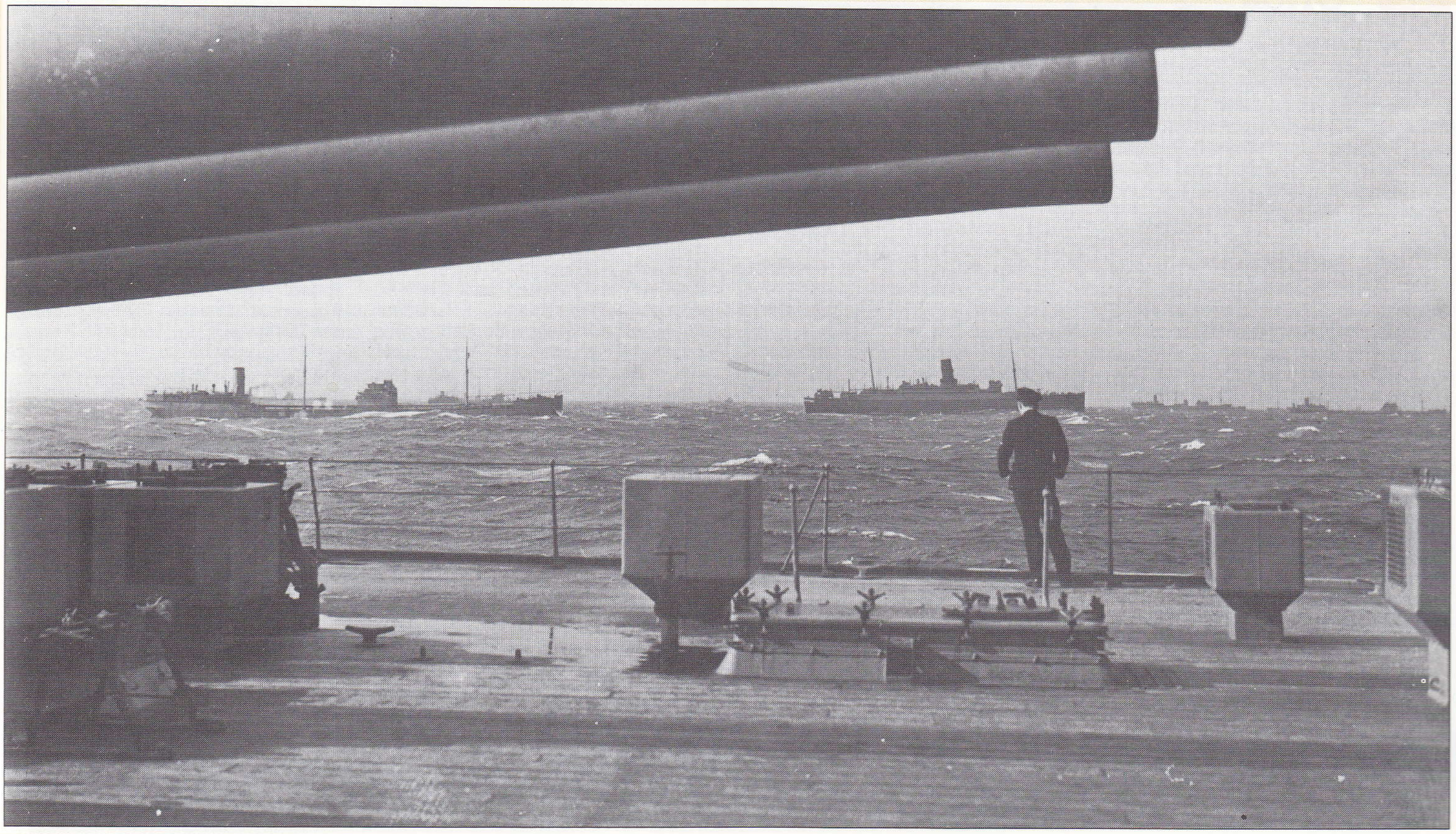
By the Armistice, 17 AMCs had been lost to all causes, but any official disquiet with regard to their vulnerability was more than offset again in 1939 by a shortage of cruisers even more acute than that of 1914. With stocks of suitable (and venerable) equipment at major bases throughout the Commonwealth, the Admiralty put 50 liners in hand for AMC conversions.

The crew of a German commerce raider watch one of their victims sink. The Royal Navy armed over 50 liners to supplement its hopelessly overstretched cruiser squadrons, but even if an AMC tracked down a raider it usually came second in the resulting battle.

They rapidly took their place in the again-successful Northern Patrol, though the loss of the *Rawalpindi* in November 1939 (described elsewhere) led to their temporary withdrawal. Losses to U-boats were the major cause for concern, these reducing the general level of surveillance to a level that enabled German raiders to break out into the Atlantic with ease. Once again there was a poor showing against raiders but, though the Admiralty wished to strengthen the AMCs' offensive power, there was little that could be done.

By mid-1941 they were removed from the more hazardous convoy routes and, by the end of 1943, most were back on trooping duties, releasing their sizeable crews for newer ships. Between 1939 and 1945 15 were lost, 10 of these to submarines and three to surface raiders. Despite controversy surrounding their use their cumulative achievements were substantial.

Convoy escort with a vengeance: an east-bound convoy is seen from the battleship HMS King George V. *In the centre is the AMC* California, *which was commissioned in October 1939 and armed with eight 6-in guns. She was later converted to a troopship and was sunk in July 1943.*



UK

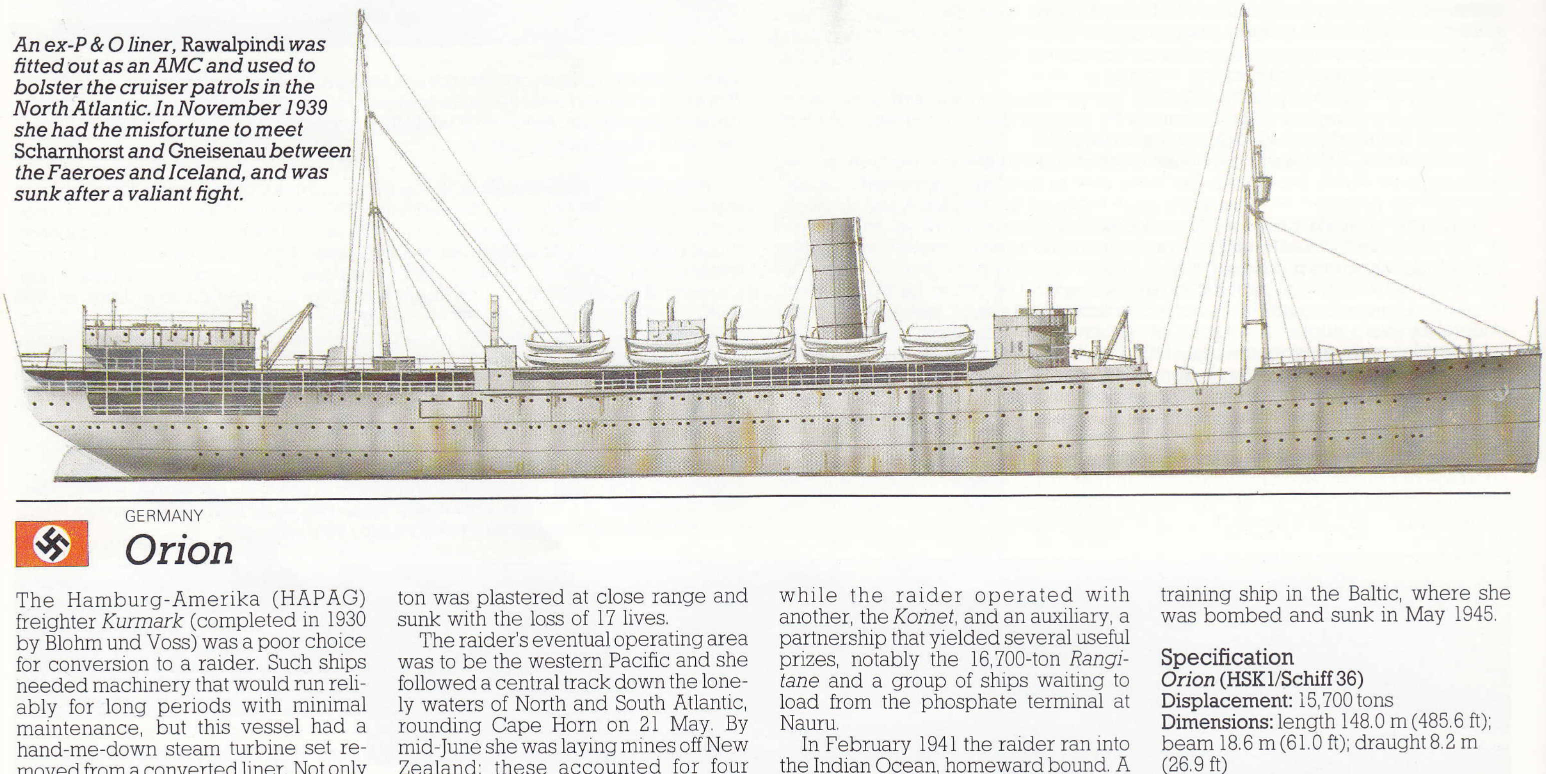
Rawalpindi

The Northern Patrol was re-instituted immediately on the outbreak of World War II in 1939. As in 1914, the barrier initially comprised old regular cruisers, soon relieved or supplemented by AMCs, of which 13 were available by the end of October. Extremely vulnerable to attack, the line was given distant support by regular sallies of the Home Fleet from Scapa Flow. It enjoyed a goodly measure of success and an organized enemy raid against it was inevitable.

Late in November 1939, two 203-mm (8-in) 'Counties' were patrolling the distant Denmark Strait supported by three AMCs, while three of the little 'C' class cruisers were between the Faeroes and Scotland. In the fierce gap between the Faeroes and Iceland, two 'C' and one 'D' class cruisers were, unusually, reinforced by HMS *Newcastle*, a powerful new 152-mm (6-in) cruiser, together with the ex-P&O liner ***Rawalpindi*** (completed by Harland & Wolff in 1925) which, like her sisters *Rajputana*, *Ranchi* and *Ranpura*, had been converted to AMCs.

On 21 November the German battlecruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* had left Wilhelmshaven to mount a quick diversionary raid in the north, and the first-named came upon the *Rawalpindi* at dusk on 23 November. As the pocket battleship *Deutschland* was thought to be coming north, the AMC reported the newcomer as such, as she desperately tried to disappear into the shifting fogbanks of the winter evening. Strangely, considering the area, the *Scharnhorst* had signalled the liner to heave-to but, ignoring this, the latter's captain, Edward Kennedy, found himself with the *Gneisenau* on his other beam. By delaying the outcome, he hoped that his flanking cruisers, *Newcastle* and HMS *Delhi*, could become involved, possibly damaging one of his adversaries sufficiently to allow the Home Fleet to take a hand. Niceties, however, were soon over and 18 modern 280-mm (11-in) guns were soon in action against the AMC's eight ancient 152-mm weapons. To her credit, the *Rawalpindi* did achieve a single hit on the *Scharnhorst*'s quarterdeck but, at 7315 m (8,000 yards) was taking full salvoes in return from two directions. In less than a quarter hour the blazing ship was finished, finally shattered by a magazine explosion. Only 38 of her crew were saved, mostly by the Germans, and 271 were lost. *Newcastle* actually sighted the enemy, but lacking radar in very poor conditions, was unable to keep contact, so that the rapid and far-reaching dispositions made by the Admiralty to apprehend the pair came to nought.

Specification
Rawalpindi
Displacement: 16,697 tons
Dimensions: length 167.0 m (547.83 ft); beam 21.7 m (71.33 ft); draught 8.6 m (28.33 ft)
Propulsion: two quadruple-expansion steam engines delivering 15,000 ihp (11185 kW) to two shafts
Speed: 17 kts
Armament: eight single 152-mm (6-in) and two 76-mm (3-in) guns
Complement: 309



An ex-P & O liner,* Rawalpindi *was fitted out as an AMC and used to bolster the cruiser patrols in the North Atlantic. In November 1939 she had the misfortune to meet* Scharnhorst *and* Gneisenau *between the Faeroes and Iceland, and was sunk after a valiant fight.

GERMANY

Orion

The Hamburg-Amerika (HAPAG) freighter *Kurmark* (completed in 1930 by Blohm und Voss) was a poor choice for conversion to a raider. Such ships needed machinery that would run reliably for long periods with minimal maintenance, but this vessel had a hand-me-down steam turbine set removed from a converted liner. Not only was it uneconomic but it was unpredictable.

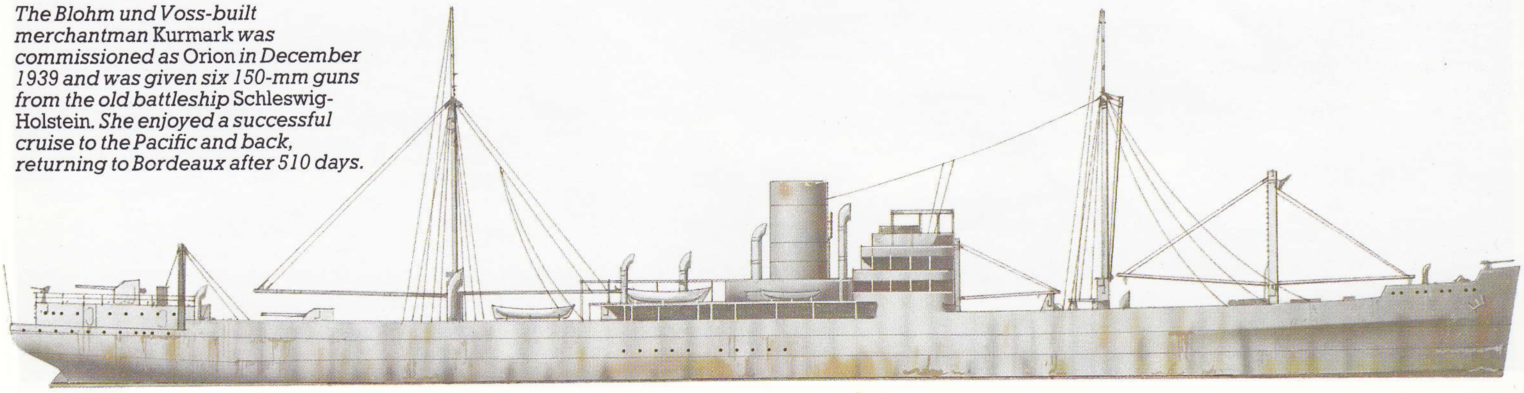
The converted ship left Germany as the ***Orion*** in April 1940, convincingly disguised as the Dutch *Beemsterdijk*. This identity was soon changed to that of a Soviet ship and, on 24 April in mid-Atlantic, she met the Ropner ship *Haxby*, which ignored the German instruction to stop and refrain from radio transmission. For this defiance the Briton was plastered at close range and sunk with the loss of 17 lives.

The raider's eventual operating area was to be the western Pacific and she followed a central track down the lonely waters of North and South Atlantic, rounding Cape Horn on 21 May. By mid-June she was laying mines off New Zealand: these accounted for four ships, including the 13,400-ton *Niagara*, carrying gold bullion.

Normal Allied trade was re-routed and the *Orion* had a very thin time for a period. Thus it was mid-August before she claimed her next victim, a small French ship near Noumea. Only a few days later she destroyed the defensively armed NZS Co. *Turakina* in the Cook Strait after a brisk fight. For a while the raider operated with another, the *Komet*, and an auxiliary, a partnership that yielded several useful prizes, notably the 16,700-ton *Rangitane* and a group of ships waiting to load from the phosphate terminal at Nauru.

In February 1941 the raider ran into the Indian Ocean, homeward bound. A meeting with a British cruiser was avoided only because she had a spotter aircraft airborne. Progress was leisurely, meandering and fruitless, only the 5,800-ton British ship *Chaucer* being added before Bordeaux was successfully reached in August 1941 after a 510-day cruise that netted 11 ships of 73,577 grt. Being so unreliable mechanically, she was demoted to a training ship in the Baltic, where she was bombed and sunk in May 1945.

Specification
***Orion* (HSK1/Schiff 36)**
Displacement: 15,700 tons
Dimensions: length 148.0 m (485.6 ft); beam 18.6 m (61.0 ft); draught 8.2 m (26.9 ft)
Propulsion: one set of geared steam turbines delivering 6,200 shp (4625 kW) to one shaft
Speed: 14 kts
Armament: six single 150-mm (5.9-in), one 75-mm (2.95-in), one twin 37-mm and four single 20-mm guns, two triple 533-mm (21-in) torpedo tubes, 230 mines and one Arado Ar 196 floatplane
Complement: 377

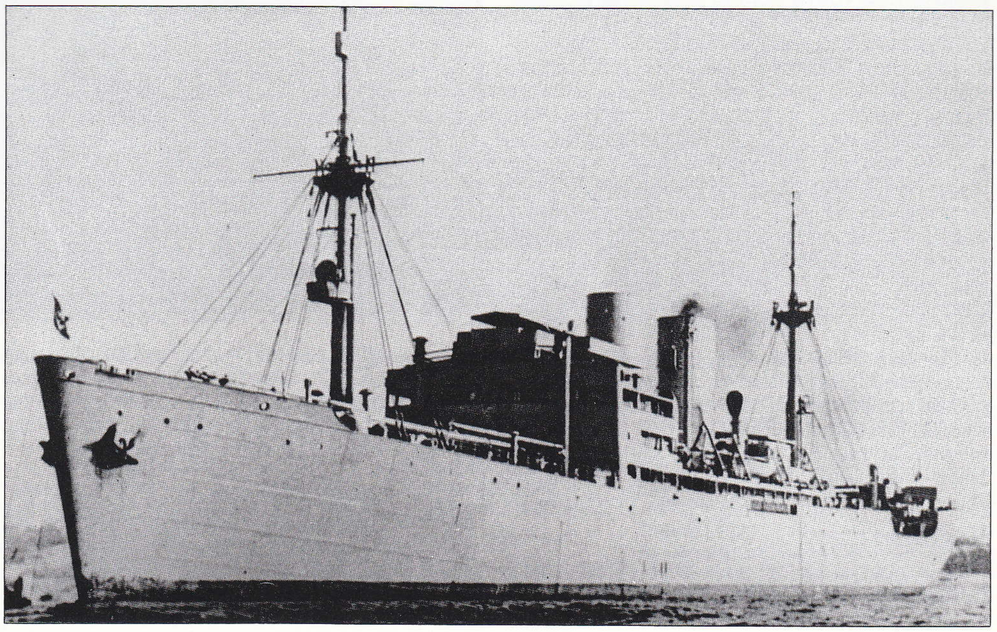


The Blohm und Voss-built merchantman* Kurmark *was commissioned as* Orion *in December 1939 and was given six 150-mm guns from the old battleship* Schleswig-Holstein. *She enjoyed a successful cruise to the Pacific and back, returning to Bordeaux after 510 days.

The Cruise of the *Atlantis*

The cruise of the* Atlantis *began at the end of March 1940 and lasted for 18 months despite the best efforts of the Royal Navy to catch her. She accounted for a succession of British merchant ships in the South Atlantic and Indian Ocean before turning for home.

Below: Atlantis *broke through the British blockade in March 1941 by passing the Denmark Strait in appalling weather. She opened her account in May by sinking a fast merchant ship sailing for Britain carrying valuable refined chromium.*



Ships of the Bremen-bassed Hansa Line made good subjects for conversion to raiders in World War II because of their powerful construction, 'tweendecks and economical diesel propulsion. The company's *Kandelfels* became the *Pinguin* while the *Goldenfels* went to war as the *Atlantis*, the most successful raider of them all.

She took the standard six 150-mm (5.9-in) guns as a main battery, old weapons saved from ships of the Kaiser's navy. Two of these were sided on the long forecastle, disguised as deck cargo. Two more, together with four torpedo tubes, were sited amidships at upper 'tweendeck level and firing through ports closed-off by heavy hinged flaps below the split superstructure. The last two were on the centreline aft, one exposed on the after deckhouse and the other concealed abaft No. 5 hatch. A disappearing 75-mm (2.95-in) 'bow chaser' was set in the eyes of the ship, and half a dozen 20- and 30-mm automatic weapons were also embarked. The large No. 2 hatch was converted for working two trouble-prone Heinkel He 114B floatplanes, stowed beneath.

Of the cargo outfit, three of the four sets of kingposts were made removable for altering the ship's profile. A dummy funnel was also devised, though its sheer size was self-defeating. The ship's diesels, while requiring more regular maintenance, were more reliable than steam plant after considerable periods at sea.

With her wartime complement (some six times more numerous than the peacetime crew), voyages of unknown duration, and the likelihood of large numbers of prisoners aboard from time to time, accommodation and provisioning had to be very carefully planned.

Renamed *Atlantis* or, officially HSK2 (HSK being an abbreviation for *Hilfskreuzer*, or auxiliary cruiser) the ship came under the command of Kapitän Bernharde Rogge, a punctilious but very able officer, whose long experience in sailing ships had taught him not only seamanship but also the values of patience and an acceptance of hardship. In ice-clogged waters of one of the worst winters in memory, the ship began trials in March 1940 in company with the *Orion* and *Widder*. Together with the *Komet, Pinguin* and *Thor* they were to form the so-called 'first wave' of raiders which, with regular warships, were to conduct a co-ordinated onslaught on Allied shipping.

On 31 March 1941, a bare week before the German invasion of Norway was due to be mounted, the *Atlantis* sailed, disguised as a Soviet freighter, *Krim*, for the passage over the top of Iceland. Narrowed by the ice edge, the Denmark Strait was dangerous and likely to be harbouring a marauding British cruiser. But shielded by the appalling weather, the raider passed unobserved. For passage down the North Atlantic, the *Atlantis* proceeded at a low and economical speed, finally being directed by SKL (the Seekriegsleitung or Naval Operations Directorate) to advertise her presence on the Freetown-Cape route in order to draw Allied warships from the Norwegian seas. Crossing the equator on 24 April, the ship was repainted in more appropriate Japanese colours.

On 2 May the first British ship was encountered, the Ellerman cargo-passenger liner *City of Exeter*. Rogge did not molest her as he would have been embarrassed by the large number of passengers aboard. Even so, the British watch was suspicious of the stranger and reported her presence.

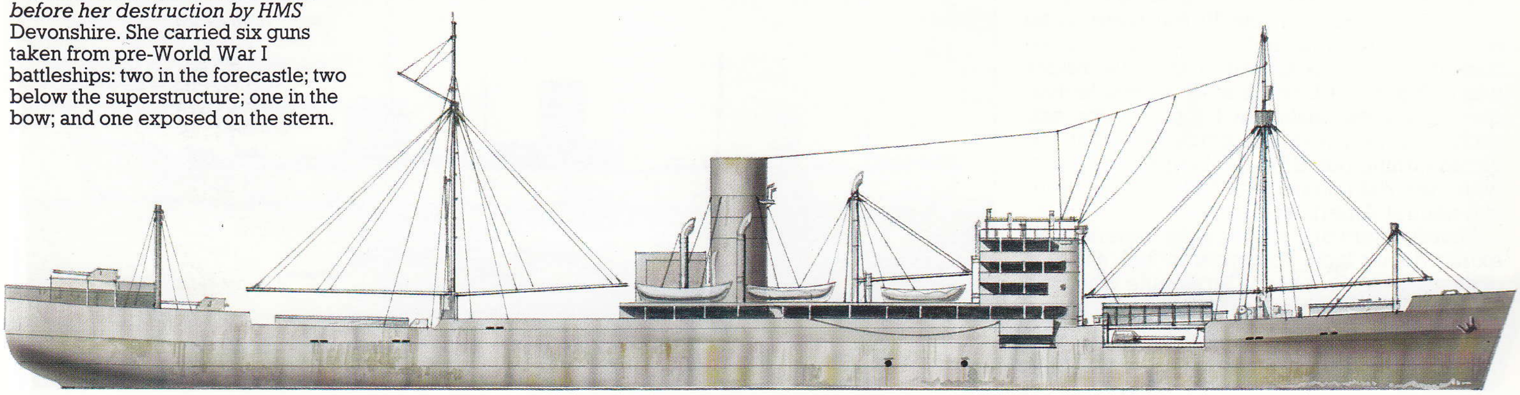
Action followed the next day, however, when the Harrison ship *Scientist* refused to stop when ordered, showed the raider her stern and began transmitting the 'QQQ' raider warning. It took several 150-mm salvoes to persuade her to submit, with fire gaining hold. The 6,200-tonner had been bound from South Africa to the UK with foodstuffs and valuable refined chromium. A torpedo finished her.

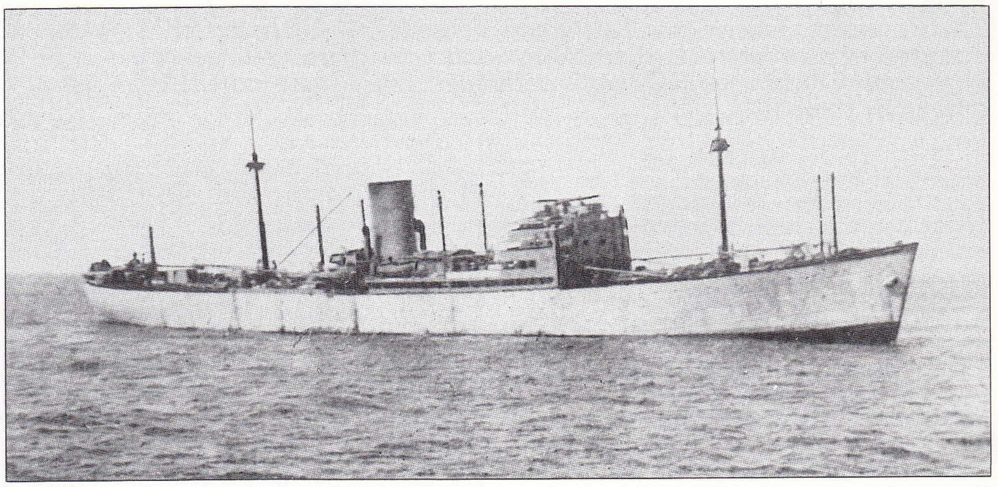
Minelaying

Her presence thus established, *Atlantis* kept ahead of retribution, making for the Cape of Good Hope and spending a night laying mines off the Agulhas light, a focal point of the South African coastwise route. Having heard also the report of a 'suspicious Japanese ship', Rogge made into the Indian Ocean, changing identity again to the Dutch *Abbekerk*.

Five weeks elapsed before the second 'kill,' the Tonsberg-registered *Tirrana* which, being new and fast, required 150 rounds of gunfire to stop. Still serviceable, she was sent back to France with a prize crew and prisoners. Among several further prizes taken in the next

Atlantis *as she appeared a week before her destruction by HMS* Devonshire. She carried six guns taken from pre-World War I battleships: two in the forecastle; two below the superstructure; one in the bow; and one exposed on the stern.





Atlantis *adopted a succession of disguises during her career, becoming firstly a Japanese freighter and then a Dutch vessel, and was masquerading as a Blue Funnel ship when she chanced upon a real one, the* Automedon.

two months was a near-sister, the *Tallyrand* which, though valuable, had too little fuel on board to be returned. Rogge therefore transferred such bunkers as she had and sank her. Effective use now was being made of the aged floatplanes to identify targets and remove their radio aerials with a trailing grapnel to prevent alerts being transmitted.

Ships taken read like a roll-call of famous lines such as Ellerman, Athel, Reardon Smith, Ben and Chareurs Réunies. Each sinking meant loss of life, a valuable ship and a vital cargo (tungsten, lead, steel, leather, teak, rice, wheat and fruit). Though Rogge to his credit kept violence to a minimum, force was usually required for a rapid result and few ships submitted on demand. A transmitted alert by the victim could easily be monitored by the raider and it usually attracted a full salvo into the bridge structure.

By October 1940 *Atlantis* was again overborne with prisoners, over 300 of whom were transferred to an unkempt and ancient Yugoslav freighter for a harrowing four-week passage to East Africa. This ship had been taken west of Sumatra, and was followed by two small Norwegian tankers, one of which had a valuable parcel of 500 tons of diesel oil aboard.

Boarding party

Now masquerading as a Blue Funnel ship, the *Atlantis* met a real one, the *Automedon* which, apparently deceived, made no attempt at evasion. She did however, refuse to stop and had her bridge blasted. This killed all senior personnel and the usual German boarding party unearthed a trove of highly classified documents in her strong-room, whose destruction nobody had ordered. Realizing their worth, Rogge sent them direct to Kobe in Japan by one of his tanker prizes. Particularly useful to the Japanese were the latest British assessments of possible reactions to a major war in the Far East. They greatly influenced the Japanese plans and the latter recognized Rogge's contribution with high honour.

For rest, refit and a further change of disguise the *Atlantis* made for the isolated island of Kerguelen in the South Indian Ocean. She grounded on a rock pinnacle, however, requiring a great deal of effort to refloat and repair with the meagre resources available.

Sailing again in January 1941, and profiting from routing charts taken from the *Automedon*, the raider made several useful captures north east of Madagascar: one Brockelbank liner, and Andrew Weir 'Bank' and a loaded tanker sent, with the prisoners, as a prize to France. Two fruitless months were spent on the Cape-Australasia route and, having reprovisioned several Italian submarines, Rogge doubled the Cape and re-entered the Atlantic on 8 April.

It was obvious that the British were using evasive re-routing and encouraging smart transmissions of 'QQQ' warnings, so the raider was obliged to adopt the more violent technique of sudden onslaught by night. The first such exercise proved an embarrassment, the victim turning out to be the Egyptian *Zamzam* with over 200 passengers, half of whom were still-neutral Americans.

Shortly afterward, the *Atlantis* experienced extraordinary luck. To conserve fuel, she was drifting on the Freetown-Cape route when the British HMS *Nelson* and HMS *Eagle* passed in the darkness within 6 km (3.7 miles) without seeing her.

Rewards were thin, with two prizes taken off St Helena in May and two off Recife in June. Of these, the 5,370-ton British *Balzac* manoeuvred with great skill, obliging the Germans to expend about 250 rounds of 150- and 75-mm ammunition before heaving to. She had been hit only four times.

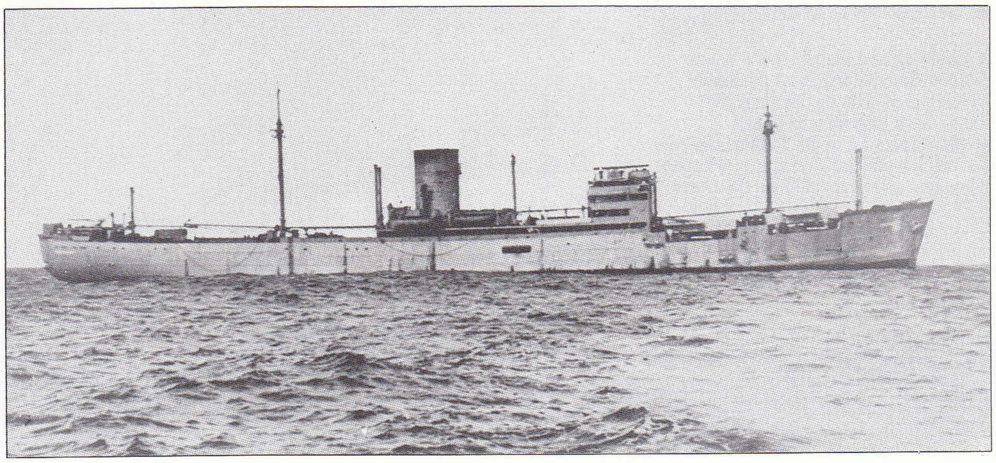
Realizing the dependence of German raiders and submarines on their supply ships, the British concentrated effectively on the latter's destruction. Following the recent loss of nine, the *Atlantis* reluctantly agreed to top up the homebound and and ever-thirsty *Orion* before doing a last circuit around the world in the latitudes of the 'Roaring Forties'. Though finding both fuel and supplies, she took only one ship, the Norwegian *Silvaplane*. It was to be her last. Over 18 months at sea were telling on the ship and crew, so Rogge made for home.

On passage in the South Atlantic, two U-boats were revictualled, the second (*U-126*) actually being alongside on 22 November 1941 when a three-funnelled ship was sighted: no liner this but the British cruiser HMS *Devonshire*, whose aircraft checked out the German, now purporting to be a Dutch-flagged Blue Funneller *Polyphemus*. The British soon established via Freetown that the claim was bogus and (not repeating HMAS *Sydney*'s fatal error with the *Kormoran* only four days before) closed only to 15545 m (17,000 yards) before opening fire and remaining at high speed. Outranged by the cruiser's 203-mm (8-in) guns, the *Atlantis* could make no effective reply and eight hits were sufficient to reduce her to a blazing wreck. Her remaining mines exploded, and the ship followed her 22 victims to the bottom. The *Devonshire* did not dally as her aircraft had reported also the U-boat's presence.

Over 300 survivors were thus adrift but the submarine surfaced, took some aboard and towed the remainder, putting all aboard the fortuitously-close supply ship *Python* during the following night. This ship remained on station and then history unthinkably repeated itself, for on 1 December, with two U-boats alongside, another British 'County' was sighted. This time it was HMS *Dorsetshire*, commanded by the same Agar who had won his VC in CMBs in the Baltic in 1919. He did not need to fire a shot, remaining 12800 m (14,000 yards) distant while the *Python* was scuttled. His caution was justified for one of the ship's erstwhile customers approached closely enough to fire an unsuccessful spread of five torpedoes.

A complex German and Italian submarine operation eventually rescued the 400-odd survivors, though some (perhaps appropriately) had had to spend up to 20 days in open boats. *Atlantis* herself had been at sea for 622 days, had covered 185000 km (115,000 miles) and had disposed of 145,697 grt of Allied shipping.

The career of Atlantis *was finally terminated by the cruiser HMS* Devonshire, *which caught her resupplying a pair of U-boats in the South Atlantic. The British vessel did not make the mistake of* Sydney *and shot the raider apart from long range.*



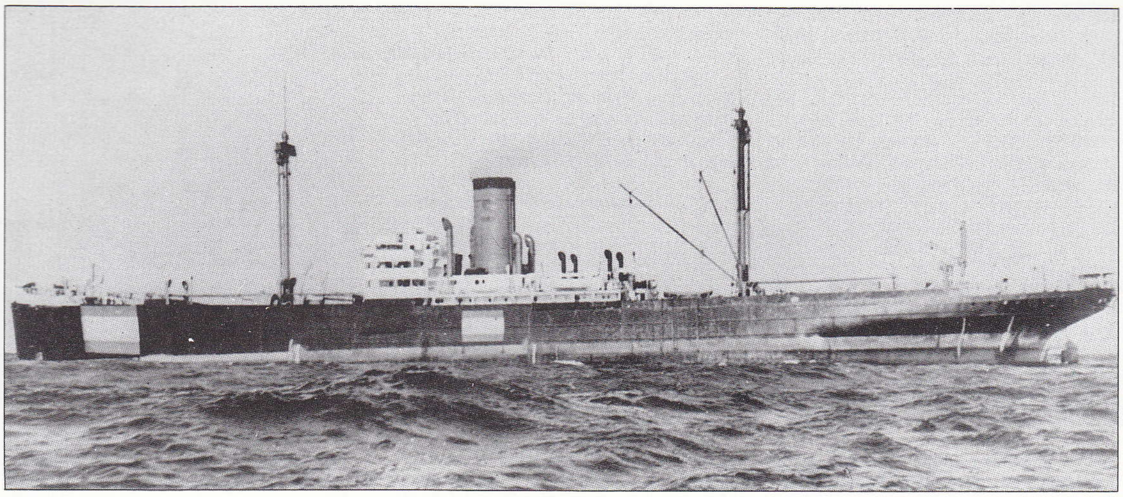
GERMANY

Widder

Most raider commanders acted with as much humanity as their trade would allow, and only von Ruckteschell of the **Widder** was later arraigned as a war criminal. Older than his peers, he differed also in being from the naval reserve. He was a quick-tempered intellectual, obsessed with attacking and pulling out in the shortest possible time. His attitude was not helped by permanent anxiety about his unpredictable machinery, his ship being a near-sister of the equally-temperamental *Orion*.

After conversion from the HAPAG *Neumark* (completed in 1929 by Howaldtswerke), the *Widder* entered the Atlantic in May 1940 by the usual northabout route, covered by the great diversion of the Norwegian campaign but having several brushes with British submarines. Her prescribed operating area was the teeming zone bounded roughly by the Panama-Europe and Panama-Cape of Good Hope routes. Her first victim was the BP (then Anglo-Iranian) tanker *British Petrol* on 13 June. Von Ruckteschell, nervous of being reported, hammered the hapless vessel with 150-mm (5.9-in) shells and a torpedo. He took a Norwegian tanker, *Krossfonn*, with no resistance and returned her to Brest with a prize crew but, on meeting the British *Davisian*, reverted and continued firing even when her crew were in the lifeboats, closing to a point where automatic weapons were being used to rake her decks. Somewhat overburdened with that perennial raider's problem, survivors, von Ruckteschell left all 59 from his next victim, the *King John*, in their lifeboats, in tropic waters and nearly 400 km (250 miles) from land.

The usual stalking and rapid night attack saw 30 shells and a torpedo being put into the Norwegian tanker *Beaulieu*, unnecessary force that, as always, cost innocent lives. In the central Atlantic, *Widder* accounted also for one of the last great square-riggers, Erikson's *Killoran*, dating from 1900 and under the Finnish flag. Next came the 5,600-ton *Anglo-Saxon*, from which only two survivors reached land after a 70-day boat voyage. Finally meting out the same treatment to the crew of the Greek *Antonios Chandris*, the ailing *Widder* returned to Bordeaux after a 180-day cruise that netted 10 ships of 58,605 grt. Her captain went on to command the raider *Michel* but his ship decommissioned, to survive the war and, ironically, to serve briefly under the red ensign.



Like **Orion, Widder** *suffered from engine trouble and her captain tended to make his attacks by night, blasting the victim at close range.*

Specification

Widder **(HSK3/Schiff 21)**

Displacement: 16,400 tons
Dimensions: length 152.0 m (498.7 ft); width 18.4 m (60.4 ft); draught 8.6 m (29.2 ft)
Propulsion: one set of geared steam turbines delivering 6,200 shp (4625 kW) to one shaft
Speed: 14 kts
Armament: six single 150-mm (5.9-in), one 75-mm (2.95-in), one twin 37-mm and four single 20-mm guns, two twin 533-mm (21-in) torpedo tubes, 60 mines, and two Heinkel He 114 floatplanes
Complement: 363

GERMANY

Thor

Though one of the smaller of the auxiliary raiders, **Thor** was one of the most successful. A modern steam-turbine driven ship capable of a good turn of speed, she was converted from the Oldenburg-Portugiesische Linie *Santa Cruz* (completed in 1938 by Deutsche Werft), and broke out into the Atlantic during unseasonably foul weather in June 1940, wasting no time getting to her operating area in the Central and South Atlantic. Between 1 and 17 July the raider took six prizes, starting with the Rotterdam-Lloyd ship *Kertosono*.

With nearly 200 prisoners already aboard, the *Thor* sighted a large liner east of Rio de Janeiro on 28 July. While such a vessel made a tempting target, this one moved with deliberation and the German captain suspected a British AMC. He was correct: she was the *Alcantara*, and she rapidly closed the range. Both ships were about equal armament, but the great bulk of the liner soon suffered critical damage that forced her to stop. *Thor*, also damaged, was keen to avoid more and the action was broken off. It was another month, however, before the raider struck again, sinking a whale factory ship and a large refrigerated cargo ship off Brazil.

On 5 December 1940, farther south, the German was surprised by another AMC, the *Carnarvon Castle*. Another brisk action developed in which the raider inflicted about 20 hits at no cost to herself. Badly damaged, the British vessel was obliged to disengage.

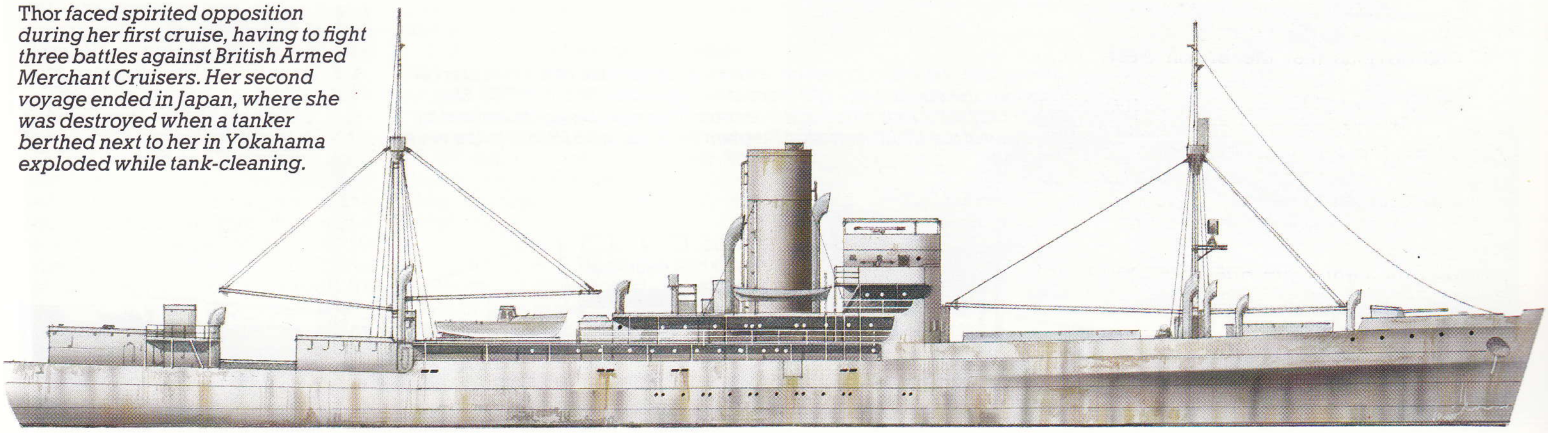
It was March 1941 before two more ships, *Britannia* and *Trolleholm*, were sunk in the central Atlantic and then, on 4 April, the *Thor* met yet another British AMC, the *Voltaire*, late of Lamport and Holt. Once hit, the British ship rapidly took fire and blazed uncontrollably, so badly that a white flag was said to be shown to end the action before the old liner sank. No ship ever exposed the questionable use of the AMC more than the *Thor*.

The raider arrived home again in the same month after a 329-day cruise that netted 12 ships of 96,574 grt. Following a refit the *Thor* sailed again in November. In the South Atlantic she claimed five prizes in quick succession, using her aircraft effectively. Five more were sunk in the Indian Ocean before the *Thor* left for Japan, arriving in Yokohama on 10 October after a 324-day cruise that netted 10 ships of 56,037 grt. She was berthed with the supply ship *Uckermark* (better known under her earlier name of *Altmark*) for refit, but on 11 November while tank-cleaning, the tanker blew up, destroying herself and several other ships including the *Thor*.

Specification

Thor **(HSK4/Schiff 10)**

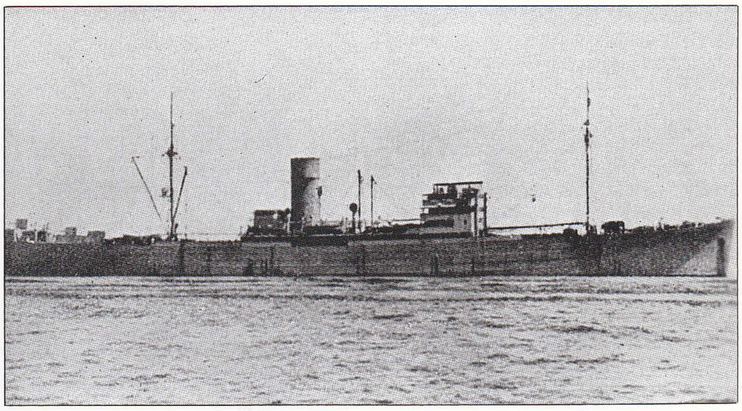
Displacement: 9,200 tons
Dimensions: length 115.61 m (379.3 ft); beam 16.7 m (54.8 ft); draught 7.1 m (23.3 ft)
Propulsion: one set of geared steam turbines delivering 6,500 shp (4845 kW) to one shaft
Speed: 18 kts
Armament: six single 150-mm (5.9-in), one 60-mm (2.36-in), one twin 37-mm and two twin 20-mm guns, two twin 533-mm (21-in) torpedo tubes, 90 mines and one Arado Ar 196 floatplane.
Complement: 346



Thor *faced spirited opposition during her first cruise, having to fight three battles against British Armed Merchant Cruisers. Her second voyage ended in Japan, where she was destroyed when a tanker berthed next to her in Yokohama exploded while tank-cleaning.*

GERMANY

Pinguin



***In January 1941,* Pinguin *attacked the expatriate Norwegian Antarctic whaling fleet off South Georgia in the South Atlantic, capturing 14 vessels, including three factory ships. Most managed to reach France under prize crews. She was sunk with heavy loss of life by HMS* Cornwall.**

Pinguin and *Atlantis* were the two most successful of the German auxiliary raiders and, coincidentally, were originally near sisters of the Hansa Line, a Bremen concern noted for the quality of its ships. As with several other raiders, the erstwhile *Kandelfels* (completed in 1936 by AG Weser) had an important subsidiary minelaying role, carrying 300 for fields planned to be laid off Australia and India. In June 1940, at the height of the Arctic summer, the ship sailed northabout, through the Denmark Strait and down the thinly-populated median line of the Atlantics. Still on passage, near Ascension Island on 31 July, she came across the Liverpool-registered *Domingo de Larrinaga* which, very suspicious, steered away, transmitting a raider alarm. Raiders were always acutely sensitive of being compromised and the *Pinguin* reacted ferociously after a two-hour pursuit.

August and September were spent in waters southeast of Madagascar, five good-sized prizes being claimed. One of these, the *Benavon* from Leight, put up a stout defence in which half of her crew were killed.

Off north west Australia the *Pinguin* took the Norwegian tanker *Storstad* which, temporarily renamed *Passat*, was loaded with many of the raider's mines. Between them, the ships laid from Newcast to Hobart (including the Bass Strait), after which the tanker was sent back to France with a prize crew.

The Antarctic summer months were then busy for the whaling fleets and January 1941 saw the raider descend on the extensive expatriot Norwegian fleet by South Georgia, capturing two factory ships, a tanker and 11 catchers. These were sent in stages back to France, most arriving safely.

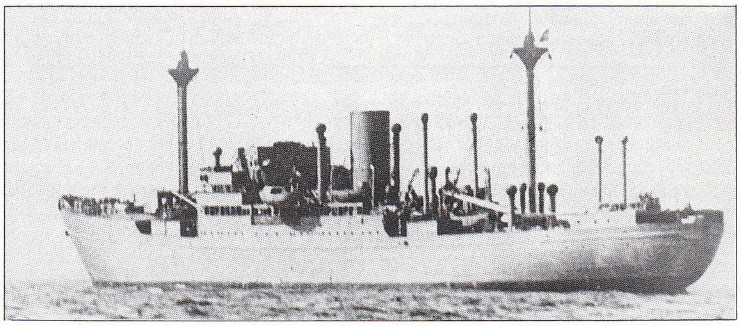
Pinguin doubled the Cape of Good Hope and made for the Horn of Africa, the busy southern approaches to the Red Sea. Here she sank the *Clan Buchanan* and the British *Emperor* in May 1941, but the latter got off a raider warning that brought the nearby heavy cruiser HMS *Cornwall* to the spot. Not deceived by the German's pose as a Norwegian Wilhelsen-line ship, the cruiser opened fire. Unfortunately the raider's remaining mines exploded, the ship disintegrated and going down with about 550 lives, nearly half of them Allied seaman prisoners. The *Pinguin* had been at sea 328 days and netted 28 ships of 136,551 grt.

Specification

***Pinguin* (HSK5/Schiff 33)**
Displacement: 17,600 tons
Dimensions: length 155.0 m (508.5 ft); beam 18.7 m (61.4 ft); draught 8.7 m (18.5 ft)
Propulsion: two diesel engines delivering 7,600 bhp (5665 kW) to one shaft
Speed: 16 kts
Armament: six single 150-mm (5.9-in), one 75-mm (2.75-in), one twin 37-mm and four single 20-mm guns, two twin 533-mm (21-in) torpedo tubes, 300 mines and one or two Arado Ar 196 or Heinkel He 114 floatplanes
Complement: 420

GERMANY

Stier



Stier *operated for a while with the raider* Michel, *the tanker* Uckermark *and the freighter* Tannenfels *in the South Atlantic. The last rescued survivors from the raider after the battle with* Stephen Hopkins.

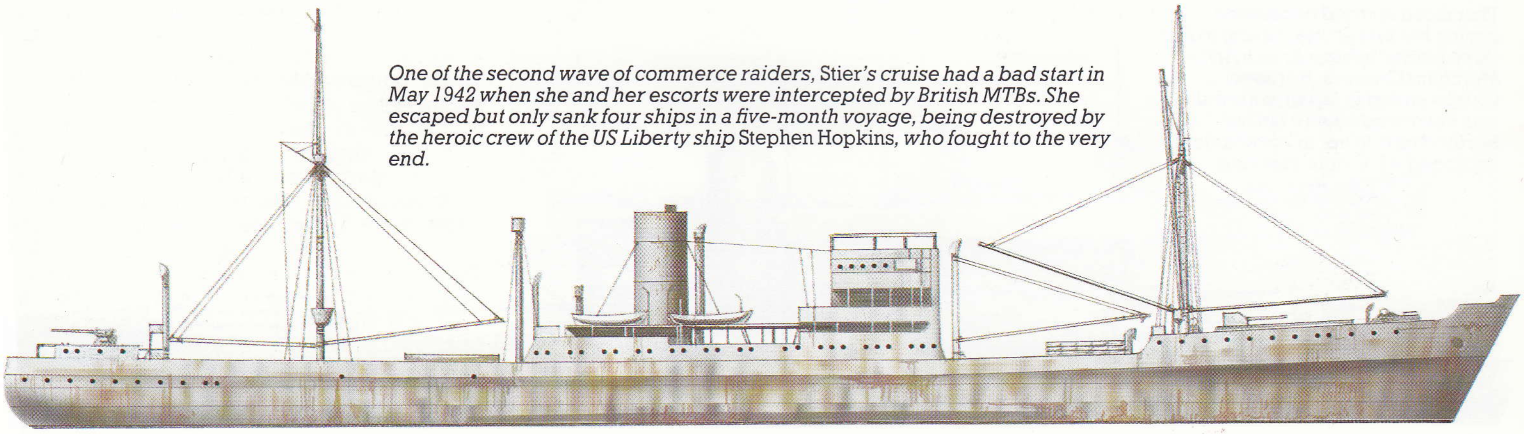
Armed with six 150-mm (5.9-in) guns and two torpedo tubes, the ***Stier*** was converted from the Atlas-Levante Linie *Cairo* (completed in 1936 by Krupp-Germania) and sailed from Rotterdam on 12 May 1942. Her passage through the Dover Strait was contested by British MTBs and shore batteries, two of her escorts being sunk along with two of the attackers. By 19 May she was safely at Bordeaux, whence she broke into the Atlantic and headed south. *Stier*'s first victim was the British freighter *Gemstone* on 4 June, but her inexperience showed only two days later when, to sink the tanker *Stanvac Calcutta*, she expended 148 rounds of 150-mm ammunition and a torpedo, while taking a couple of hits from the tanker's defensive armament. The South Atlantic seemed deserted and it was not until 9 August that a third ship, the *Dalhousie*, was sunk on the Cape Town-Trinidad route.

In mid-September in this vast, empty ocean, the ship met with another raider, the *Michel*, the freighter *Tannenfels* (with a cargo from Japan) and the tanker/storeship *Uckermark* (ex-*Altmark*). After the group broke up, *Stier* remained in company with the *Tannenfels* and early on 27 September both ships were hove-to engaged in painting and maintenance. Visibility was only about 3 km (1.9 miles) and the sudden appearance of another ship caused some anxious moments. The stranger was, however, a merchantman and the nervous *Stier* opened fire immediately, but without halting the ship. She was, in fact, only a standard American 'Liberty' ship, the *Stephen Hopkins*, armed with a single 127-mm (5-in) gun aft and a pair of 40-mm guns forward, but these were immediately brought into action and served magnificently. Even as the *Stier* closed, she took a hit that jammed her helm and, as she slewed, a second hit that caused havoc in the engine room. Weight of fire was with the German, however, and the gallant *Hopkins* was disabled and sunk. The *Stier* (which overestimated her opponent's armament as one 152-mm/6-in and two 102-mm/4-in or 127-mm guns) was badly ablaze, eventually blowing up. While her survivors were rescued by the *Tannenfels*, the Americans were left in their boats, only 15 out of 57 surviving their ordeal. After 139 days at sea the *Stier* had netted only four ships of 30,062 grt.

Specification

***Stier* (HSK6/Schiff 23)**
Displacement: 11,000 tons
Dimensions: length 134.0 m (439.6 ft); beam 17.3 m (56.8 ft); draught 7.2 m (23.6 ft)
Speed: 14 kts

Armament: six single 150-mm (5.9-in), one twin 37-mm and four single 20-mm guns, two single 533-mm (21-in) torpedo tubes, and two Arado Ar 231 floatplanes
Complement: 324



One of the second wave of commerce raiders,* Stier's *cruise had a bad start in May 1942 when she and her escorts were intercepted by British MTBs. She escaped but only sank four ships in a five-month voyage, being destroyed by the heroic crew of the US Liberty ship* Stephen Hopkins, *who fought to the very end.

GERMANY

Komet

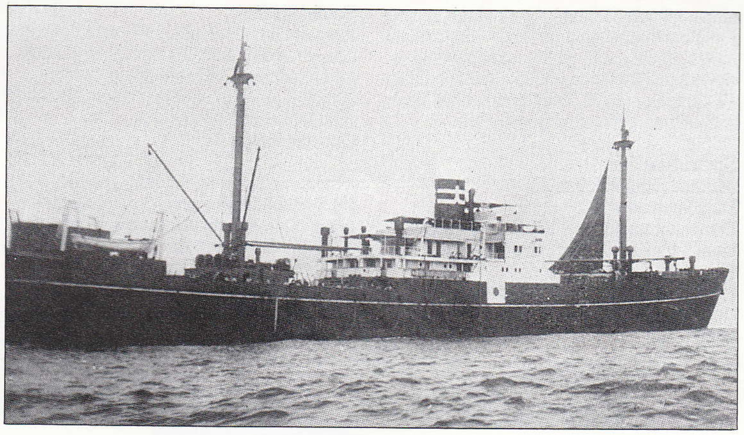
The **Komet**'s route to her operating area was unique, sailing as she did (after conversion from the Norddeutscher Lloyd *Ems*, completed in 1937 by Deutsche Werft) from Norway in early July 1940 and, with the ice-breaking assistance of Germany's then-ally the USSR, passing north of the Asian land mass, entering the Pacific via the Bering Strait just two months later. As the smallest of the raiders and not ice-strengthened, she showed remarkable powers of resistance even in this 'summer' ice, at the cost of a damaged rudder.

Her operating area was in the western Pacific and she meandered southward along a still-neutral Japanese chain to meet with the raider *Orion* and the storeship *Kulmerland*. On 25 November, nearly five months after sailing, the *Komet* took her first ship, the 546-ton New Zealand coaster *Holmwood*, whose failure to broadcast an alarm resulted in the loss, two days later, of the 16,700-ton *Rangitane*. This ship, together with others sunk off Nauru, was credited jointly to the two raiders, which also heavily shelled the phosphate loading facilities of the island.

At the end of the year, the group broke up and *Komet* headed south to the Antarctic, arriving just one month later after the *Pinguin*, though at a different meridian. She lacked the latter's fortune, however, and the pair met briefly in March 1941, at the isolated island of Kerguelen.

Like *Michel*, the *Komet* carried an LS boat but adapted for minelaying rather than torpedoes. The craft's engines both failed and she was scuttled. Larger moored mines were carried by the raider and she used one of *Pinguin*'s captured whale-catchers to lay them off Australia and New Zealand.

The raider then crossed the Pacific to sink three merchantmen near the Galapagos islands before rounding the Horn and finally reaching Hamburg in November 1941 after 510 days at sea. The voyage had not been very successful with only seven ships of 431,832 grt to show for nearly 18 months at sea. Refurbished, she sailed again in October 1942, taking the risky coast-hopping route down the English Channel. The British were well aware of her progress and, despite her heavy escort, caught her off Cape de la Hague with a powerful destroyer and MTB force. The raider blew up, leaving no survivors.

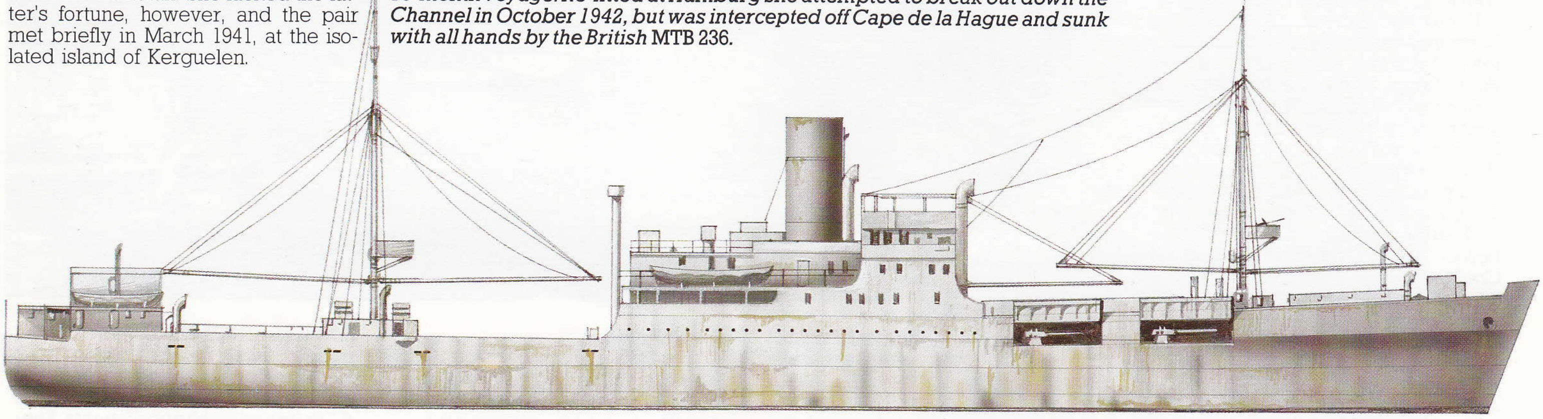


Komet *sailed from Norway in July 1940 and, with the assistance of Hitler's then-ally the Soviet Union, she passed north of the Russian landmass, entering the Pacific via the Bering Strait in September. She was well equipped, carrying two aircraft and a midget torpedo boat.*

Specification

Komet **(HSK7/Schiff 45)**
Displacement: 7,500 tons
Dimensions: length 115.0 m (377.3 ft); beam 15.3 m (50.2 ft); draught 6.5 m (21.3 ft)
Propulsion: two diesel engines delivering 3,900 bhp (2910 kW) to one shaft
Speed: 16 kts
Armament: six single 150-mm (5.9-in), one 60-mm (2.36-in), one twin 37-mm and four single 20-mm guns, two twin and two single 533-mm (21-in) torpedo tubes, 270 mines, one LS minelaying boat with 30 special mines, and two Arado Ar 196 floatplanes
Complement: 270

By her own efforts, Komet *accounted for only half a dozen British ships in an 18-month voyage. Re-fitted at Hamburg she attempted to break out down the Channel in October 1942, but was intercepted off Cape de la Hague and sunk with all hands by the British* MTB 236.



GERMANY

Michel

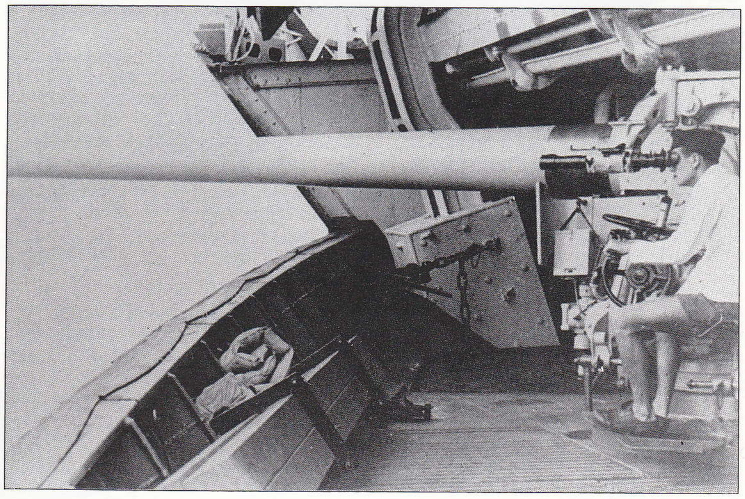
Widder's captain, von Ruckteschell, went on to command one of the last raiders, **Michel**, a new ship that had been seized in 1939 while building as the *Bielsko* in Danzig to Polish account. Shortly after Operation 'Cerebus' she was cheekily sailed westward on 13 March 1942 through the English Channel; her passage was under heavy escort and hotly contested by the Royal Navy, but she got through with light damage.

The ship carried an LS (*Leichtes Schnellboot*), a 12.5-m (41-ft) high-speed craft armed with two 450-mm (17.7-in) torpedoes. These were used effectively to reduce the American tanker *Connecticut* to a pyre in the South Atlantic on 22 April. At first light on 1 May the raider met up with the Blue Funneller *Menelaus* which was not deceived by von Ruckteschell's pretence of being a British auxiliary and took off at high speed, signalling raider warnings and avoiding the LS boat's torpedoes.

For almost a year, the *Michel* operated in the South Atlantic, once doubling the Cape of Good Hope for a brief raid on the Cape-India route. While the LS boat was used on occasion, the captain's usual tactics of a sudden, overwhelming night assault were more normal. Such an attack was on the *Gloucester Castle* in July 1942; though the old liner was carrying only a handful of passengers the death toll was still 93.

In New Year's Day 1943, the *Michel* claimed her 15th victim, the British *Empire March* in the usual night attack. From close range, the freighter was the recipient of 64 150-mm (5.9-in) and 16 105-mm (4.13-in) rounds, over 300 rounds of automatic fire and four torpedoes. Miraculously, 25 survived this frenzied attack.

The raider now crossed the Indian Ocean for a refit in Japan after 358 days at sea and 14 ships netted. She sailed again in June under the ex-captain of the *Thor*, sinking two Norwegian freighters west of Australia before crossing the Pacific to dispose of the Norwegian tanker *India* near Easter Island. With her overall score at 17



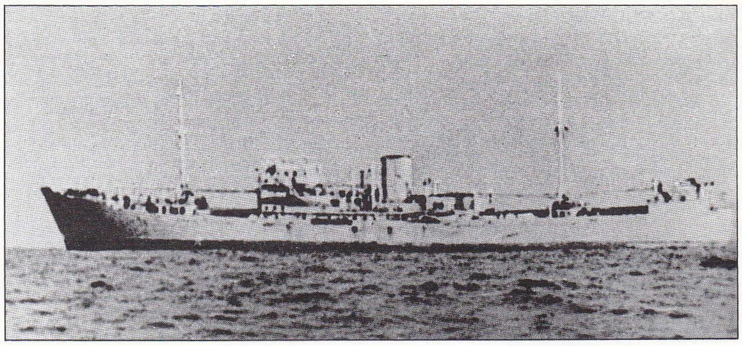
Shipping some of the guns from Widder *and under the command of the former raider's captain,* Michel *sailed from Flushing in March 1942. Her torpedo boat was used to sink the US tanker* Connecticut *and the raider spent a year in the South Atlantic before sailing to Japan.*

ships of 121,995 grt, the raider made for Yokohama and, a bare 100 km (60 miles) from port, was sunk by torpedoes from the US submarine *Tarpon* on 17 October 1943. This last raider took 263 of her own down with her.

Specification

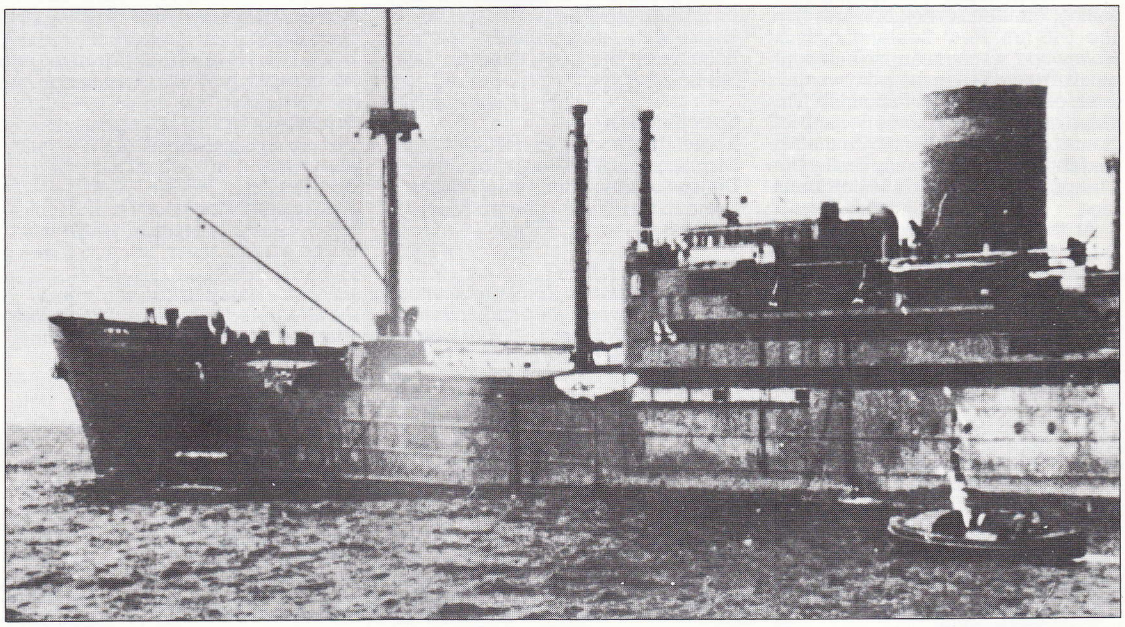
***Michel* (HSK9/Schiff 28)**
Displacement: 10,950 tons
Dimensions: length 132.0 m (433.1 ft); beam 16.8 m (55.1 ft); draught 7.4 m (24.3 ft)
Propulsion: two diesel engines delivering 6,650 hp (4960 kW) to one shaft
Speed: 16 kts
Armament: six single 150-mm (5.9-in), one 105-mm (4.13-in), two twin 37-mm and four single 20-mm guns, two twin 533-mm (21-in) torpedo tubes, and two Arado Ar 196 floatplanes
Complement: 400

Michel *refitted at Kobe in Japan before sailing on another raid, this time commanded by the ex-captain of* Thor. *She increased her score to 18 before setting course for Yokohama, but was torpedoed and sunk 60 miles short of safety by the submarine USS* Tarpon.



GERMANY

Kormoran



In common with several other raiders, ***Kormoran*** (the ex-HAPAG *Steiermark*, completed in 1938 by Krupp-Germania) went northabout, through the Denmark Strait, disguised initially as a Soviet freighter. She was a new ship, propelled unusually by a diesel-electric installation. Her orders were wide-ranging: besides operating in the Indian Ocean, the South Atlantic and off Australasia, she was to lay mines off Australia, New Zealand, the East Indies, India and South Africa, as well as carry spares for submarines operating in the South Atlantic.

For the first three months of 1941 the *Kormoran* operated in the Atlantic narrows, between South America and West Africa. Here she claimed four victims including the BP tanker *British Union* in ballast, the Blue Star refrigerator ship *Afric Star* and the Blue Funneler *Eurylochus*. She left the area for a period as a result of engine trouble but returned to destroy four more, including the Anglo-Saxon (Shell) tanker *Agnita* and T & J Harrison's *Craftsman*. The last-named was difficult to sink because of her cargo of nets and floats, and her particularly strong construction. The next victim, a Greek with a timber cargo, was similarly difficult, wasting both time and ammunition.

Frustrated in her minelaying plans by the weather off South Africa, the raider had an equally unrewarding time because of enemy activity off India, though two more merchantmen were sunk in the Bay of Bengal. In mid-October, the *Kormoran* rendezvoused with the supply ship *Kulmerland* west of Australia, for a short period of self-refit and a (fortunate) transfer of prisoners.

On 19 November 1941 a cruiser was sighted astern and the Germans, posing as the Dutch ship *Straat Malakka*, steamed away and into the sun to gain time. The cruiser, HMAS *Sydney*, was totally misled by the confusing signals with which the *Kormoran* replied to every challenge and unwisely pulled parallel and to within 1.6 km (1 mile). Suddenly the Dutch colours of the freighter were replaced by the German naval ensign and a storm of fire was let loose. The lightly protected warship never recovered but, even when torpedoed and blazing, kept up a slow but steady fire and the *Kormoran*, too, was eventually badly ablaze. in both shattered ships the guns fell silent as darkness fell. The *Sydney* was never seen again and the German was abandoned, blowing up when her raging fires touched off her yet unlaid mines. In 352 days at sea she had netted 11 ships of 68,289 grt, and the *Sydney*.

Specification

***Kormoran* (HSK8/Schiff 41)**
Displacement: 19,900 tons
Dimensions: length 164.0 m (538.0 ft); beam 20.2 m (66.3 ft); draught 8.5 m (27.9 ft)
Propulsion: diesel-electric with four diesel generators supplying current to two motors delivering 16,000 bhp (11930 kW) to one shaft
Speed: 18 kts
Armament: six single 150-mm (5.9-in), two twin 37-mm and five single 20-mm guns, two twin 533-mm (21-in) torpedo tubes, 320 mines, one LS torpedo boat, and two Arado Ar 196 floatplanes
Complement: 397

Kormoran *broke into the Atlantic through the Denmark Strait disguised as a Russian freighter, and sailed south to operate in the central Atlantic and re-supply U-boats. She later entered the Indian Ocean and rendezvoused with the supply ship* Kulmerland *off Australia.*

Kormoran *was intercepted by HMAS* Sydney *off Western Australia, but the wily German crew managed to draw the cruiser to within a mile before opening fire, with devastating effect.* Kormoran *was herself destroyed, but not before inflicting fatal damage to her vastly superior opponent.*